

Migrant worker children: conceptions of homelessness and implications for education

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In this paper the authors draw from interviews with young migrant workers to problematize the question “What is a home?” The argument is made that once we acknowledge alternative images of “home” and the values and priorities that follow, policies and services for migrant workers and their children might take different forms than are currently configured. Migrating, or becoming “homeless,” is a choice these families make to maintain their family structure. For these people homed–homeless is not a dichotomy. Rather, the operative word is family. The structure of the family is analyzed as a lifeworld (Habermas, 1984, 1987), or system of values and experiences that defines choices and ways of acting. Importantly, migrant workers travel as families and often as extended families. The unit of the family is assumed. Tensions arise when an individual member of the family questions the assumption of everyone working together for the family unit. When the family decides to break the unit, for example by sending a child away so he/she can attend school, the unit suffers as well as the individual. The sense of power that many assume is located in the home – a particular physical space – is also located in the family and the relationships among persons the word family implies. Social policies and institutions often disregard this distinction.¹

Introduction

Both of my parents were born in Piedras Negras, a small town in Mexico just across the border. They both also dropped out of school before finishing grade school so they could start working and contributing towards their family’s income and also help raise the rest of the kids. That’s pretty regular down there. My older brother, who’s now twenty-three, was born in Piedras but soon after he was born they decided to move to the U.S. They ended up in Eagle Pass, another town close to the border and just north of Piedras Negras. I’ve been told that they moved so they could find work but Eagle Pass has a pretty high unemployment rate so there wasn’t really any work to be found there. That’s why they decided to start migrating up north to Iowa, to find the work they thought they would find in the valley. Not too weird or anything like that. I would say most of the families where I’m from migrate. (Hector Castillo)

In this quote, Hector describes his experiences as a migrant agricultural worker. The life of the migrant worker has many aspects of homelessness: the family or individual is poor and rootless for much of the year. Social services such as health

care and education are discontinuous and often of low quality. The people seem to fall between the cracks of our society because of their life on the road and the low level of interactions they have within the communities they work. It is tempting to ascribe their problems of health, educational attainment and crime to their homelessness for, in many ways, these *are* the result of the homeless life they appear to lead.

The word home, to many people in the United States, is a symbol of freedom, choice, and power. It is a physical place that one shapes the way one wants, reflecting the “inner” person, and where individuals can act like they choose without pretense or role playing. Often home signifies a commodity, an object of monetary value that reflects the owner’s value. To others, however, home is a conceptual or an emotional space used to represent relationships. We believe migrant workers such as Hector also think of home in terms synonymous with the word family where it suggests a conceptual space that defines roles and relationships. Home in this sense is not a creation that reflects individuality but an institution that shapes the identities of those within it. In much of the rhetoric surrounding homelessness the first conceptualization of home as a place seems to be dominant. In our work with Latina/o migrant agricultural workers the second sense of the word is apparent. Home means family for many migrant workers and is, in part, detached from space and place and these families often choose to be “homeless,” in the sense that we usually think of the term, in order to maintain their “home” or family structure. In particular, choosing to be in the United States (for most are not U.S. nationals) signifies choosing family over “home”.

In this paper we draw from interviews with young college-aged migrant workers to problematize the question “What is a home?” We make the argument that once we acknowledge multiple or diverse images of “home” (both the family and the physical structure) and the values and priorities that follow from a particular image, policies and services for migrant workers and their children might take a different form than they have at present. They might then better serve purposes such as education and preserving the family unit better. It is important to note, looking at Hector as an example, that migrant workers travel as families and often as extended families. The unit is assumed. Tensions arise when one member of the family questions the assumption of everyone working for the unit. When the family decides to break the unit, for example by sending a child away so he/she can attend school, the unit suffers as well as the individual. The sense of power that many assume is located in the home is actually located in the family. Social policies and institutions often disregard this distinction.

We begin by defining migrant workers and provide statistical descriptions to underscore the significance of their numbers as a population. Then we describe our data and analysis methods. We use the words of the migrant workers to describe the effect migrating has on migrant worker children’s lives. We analyze these stories by developing an understanding that migrating represents an exercising of power in the sense that Foucault (1980, 1982) uses the term. Migrating is a choice these families make to maintain their family structure. For these people homed–homeless is not a dichotomy. Rather the operative word to define home is “family.” The structure of the family is analyzed as a lifeworld (Habermas, 1984, 1987), or system of values and experiences, which defines choices and ways of acting. We relate this concept of lifeworld as applied to

migrant worker families to Moll's (e.g., Moll, 1988) idea of "funds of knowledge" in order to be able to make our argument for the sorts of educational services that would be helpful to migrant worker children and their families. We conclude with a discussion of the needs and supports that could be implemented to support their concepts of home-family, and simultaneously enable such things as an education.

Migrant farm workers: statistics and context

The United States currently is undergoing a change in its ethnic and linguistic make-up. Spencer (1986) estimated that in the year 2000 the total Latina/o population in the United States would reach about 30 million while the actual Latina/o population reported by the 2000 US census was 35,305,818, representing an increase from 9% to 12% of the total population from 1990 to 2000. Diaz-Rico and Weed (1995) predicted that one in every three persons living in the United States would reflect a Latina/o, African-American, or Asian background. According to García (1995), California already has undergone a minority-majority transformation. He estimated that in approximately 20 years, non-White students would account for 70% of the state's population, and of those "half will speak a language other than English on the first day of school" (p. 372). Finally, the U.S. Census Bureau (2000) projects an increase in the Latino/a school population to 17% in 2020 from 12% in 2000. Of these children a significant percentage fall into the category "migrant." According to the U.S. Department of Labor's National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS), the number of migrants increased from 32% of the farm labor force in 1989 to 51% between 1993 and 1998 (see Carroll, Gabbard, & Fernandez Mot, 2000). Recent data in the Midwest, for example, have shown a change in agricultural farm workers who qualify as migrants from Whites, African-Americans, Mexicans and Mexican-Americans to almost exclusively Mexicans and Mexican-Americans (King-Stoops, 1980; Prewitt Diaz, Trotter, & Rivera, 1990). According to these authors the majority of these migrant farm workers travel in family groups with school-age children.

When discussions of homelessness occur at the national and state levels, migrant families are usually overlooked (Parsad, Heaviside, Williams, & Farris, 2000). Federal law defines migrant workers for educational purposes as agricultural workers or fishermen/women who migrate for employment purposes and who "have moved from one school district to another within the preceding 36 months" (Public Law 103-382, 1994). The exact number of English Language Learners is not known; however, Strang et al. (1993, cited in Godina, 1998) estimated that 90% of adult migrants speak a language other than English in the home, and 84% of them speak little or no English. Many of the families we interacted with in this study are "homeless" for part of the year; however, many do return to a particular community in Texas to live during the winter months. Their lives on the road are oriented towards this return. In Texas, they live in homesteads, buildings that extended family members have erected on public land at the outskirts of towns. As the family grows, the building is added onto. Many other migrants, however, do not have such roots and "follow the crops" for the entire length of time they live the migrant life.

Data and analysis

The data presented here are drawn from a larger study examining the public education experiences of migrant worker children. In this larger study we have acted as participant researchers for 3 years in schools serving the needs of migrant worker children in Illinois. Many of the children we work with in Illinois came from the Rio Grande Valley region of Texas. They migrated with their extended families along a particular and regular route through northern Texas into Illinois and Iowa and then back through Tennessee and the southern states to Texas for the winter. In many instances this migration pattern had been followed for multiple generations.

For this article, a series of interviews with college-aged migrant students from this population were conducted. These students were selected as part of a study of experiences and structures that allow a minority of migrant worker children to become successful in schools. In particular a series of six, two-hour semistructured interviews were conducted with five freshman students at a college in Austin, Texas. All interviews were audiotaped for transcription and later analysis. The initial interview was devoted to gathering background information on the participants, while the last discussion was left open to elaborate on relevant aspects of our conversations in prior interviews and member checks. Time-in-the-field ideas, interpretations, and conclusions were tested and discussed with participants, allowing them to react, and thereby enhance the credibility of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Interview guides were developed with several narrative points in mind: questions were developed to elicit stories rather than reports, and participants were always invited to tell stories about their experiences. We encouraged them to make the relevance of the storytelling clear in their own terms (Polany, 1985). Thus, during interviews whenever generalizations were made, students would be invited to tell stories about past experiences that embodied their abstractions and would demonstrate how the abstracted meanings emerged through experience (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Participants are looked upon as constructors of knowledge in collaboration with the interviewer (Schwandt, 1999).

The design of the interview questions encouraged respondents to structure life stories around the topics that emerged as the interviews unfolded. These stories addressed particular facets of the participants' lives as they relate to their educations (Wallace, 1994). As a result the stories participants told were about their experiences situated in their larger cultural traditions (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). No a-priori categories were imposed that would limit the field of inquiry (Fontana & Frey, 1998) and intentions, motives, meanings, contexts, situations, and circumstances of action were probed (Denzin, 1988).

Data analysis was ongoing in the sense that it was a continual part of data collection that helped in analysis after leaving the field (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). In-the-field analysis included listening and re-listening to interview tapes in addition to reviewing observational notes so that emerging themes and concepts could be noted. With the use of in-the-field analysis, data-collection sessions could be planned in light of what happened in previous sessions, and themes and concepts could be tried out and discussed with colleagues and participants.

Post-field analysis involved a range of analytic procedures ranging from highly structured to the more open-ended (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). The student's narratives were analyzed structurally and thematically. In this manner themes such as "family" were uncovered that articulate and illustrate the everyday meanings of the stories (Riessman, 1993) but in a manner that maintains their integrity. Presenting their original accounts in a manner organized about themes captures the richness and detail of experience, compliments the participants' individuality, and highlights themes that emerge through the reading of the data (Cole & Knowles, 1995). Following Coffey and Atkinson (1996) themes were used to explore how the social actors frame and make sense of particular sets of experiences with these themes acknowledged as providing insight into cultural understandings. These themes constituted analytic points of departure from which data were reread and explored in more detail with attention paid to the characters, events, and happenings central in the participant's experiences. From both general and detailed readings, Kvale (1996) suggests that finding the plot or storyline within and between stories provides them with unity and coherence. Thus, the narratives develop the themes and the themes provide a coherence that acts to organize the individual stories into a richer, more condensed and coherent tale. It is these final stories we present here.²

The migrant farmer worker experience

Both my parents were born in Mier, Mexico but later moved and grew up in Ciudad Miguel Aleman. They met and married at a very young age; my dad was 20 and my mom 15. Neither finished school so they moved to Houston to find work and my dad ended up working different jobs in construction and carpentry. This is where my brother and I were born but soon after that we moved to Roma, a small border town in the Texas valley, so we could be closer to family. My dad continued traveling to Houston so he could find construction work while me, my mom, my brother, and eventually my third and youngest brother would remain at home.

The problems I saw were in the drugs, crime, unemployment, and poverty that plagued Roma. Despite being surrounded by it I was always able to keep myself out of trouble. But this trouble finally landed in our house when I was 12 and my dad was arrested for selling drugs. Among the group caught, my father was the only one that returned to court for his trial after being released on bail. Because of this the judge cut his initial sentence of 5 to 8 years to half that time. While in jail my mom and dad divorced and when released he was deported back to Mexico. My dad was never a U.S. citizen. He was a resident alien and at the time federal law said that any alien convicted of a federal offense had to be deported.

After my dad's arrest things really changed. We went from having the money that drugs provided to having nothing. My mom proved strong though and went back to school, finished high school, got a nursing degree, and supported us on her own. But I could see it was a struggle for her. When I was 14, I began to migrate so I could help my mom out with money. She didn't want me to go. She thought that it might be too tough for me since I had never been exposed to such a thing. But I decided to go anyway. So when school let out I headed over

to west Texas and the town of Loveland with some of my extended family and we would find jobs cleaning cotton and picking onions. But I would always leave after school had let out and return before school began. My mom insisted on that. She thought education was real important.

It was during this time that my mom met my step-dad and my half-brother was born. Well he owned a car wash in Roma that wasn't doing too well and since my mom had gotten pregnant with my baby stepbrother, he decided that the whole family was going to migrate to work in the fields and earn some money. So that summer it wasn't just me but my whole family that headed west to work in the cotton and onions. But the following summer my step-dad decided to take us all the way up to Illinois. See, that last summer he had heard about Illinois and the detasseling³ work you could get for good pay. We got jobs at a hybrid company and we were such good workers that the company offered my stepfather a job for the whole year. So he took it and that's where my family's been this past year.

Even though I value the experiences I've had as a migrant and it made me appreciate what it takes to earn a living and support a family, it was pretty tough. Besides the weather being incredibly hot or the rain making it difficult to even move through the fields, I had other stuff I had to do also. Living in apartments or in trailers means pretty cramped quarters so we all had to chip in and keep things clean. And since I was the oldest and my mom was pregnant I was also in charge of doing laundry, helping out with all the meals, keeping up the equipment that we were using in the fields, and making sure that we had plenty of water for the next day's work. Yea, I guess going into the field means a lot more than just working in them. (Juan Escalante)

Juan's story is in many ways typical of the migrant workers we interviewed. In 1960, Edward R. Murrow's documentary "Harvest of shame" increased public awareness about the lives of migrant laborers and their families and motivated Congress to include language in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 to help the children of migrant farm workers. NAWS data (Carroll et al., 2000) point out the differences between migrant and non-migrant farmworker children and, in doing so, the need for special social services and educational programs for the former. Perhaps the most important difference, in the sense of governmental services, is in household income: 82% of migrant farmworker children live in households that have below poverty incomes, compared with 33% of non-migrant farmworker children.

Few studies or descriptions of migrant workers' lives have been published. One ethnography, *Fields of toil: A migrant family's journey* (Valle, 1994), traces a family's "migrant cycle" from when they leave Texas to "follow the crop," migrating through the northern states and finally returning to Texas. This work describes the different farm jobs members of the family obtain during a season, how the family returns to Texas, and the months they live in the valley through the off season until it is time for them to travel north. The book suggests that many of the hardships associated with the migrant cycle arise from maintaining the family, keeping everyone together as a unit. Troubles with transportation – multiple vehicles are needed for the numbers of people often working different jobs, driving through horrible weather to get north – for they have to be at particular places at particular times, long hours in the field, poor living conditions, and struggles with money arise because the family is

maintained with everyone traveling together, everyone living together. All of these hardships threaten family survival as the obvious answer to many of their problems is to break up the family. Finally all of the things that a migrant mother, father, son, or daughter must do to help get through these difficulties (quitting school to work, fixing a broken-down truck, visiting social and migrant services, etc.) reflects choosing to maintain the family as a whole. We suggest that, in this way, the family is not only a focal point but also the construct in which these hardships lie. For example, in Juan's narrative it is because social relations are prioritized that hardships occur. Juan begins migrating when he is 14 to help his mother. He continues to go into the fields to help the family. Juan's family migrates as a group. Juan makes sacrifices to help the family with everyday needs when in Illinois. The family makes sacrifices so that Juan can go to school, for when he goes to school, he is no longer contributing his paycheck to the family budget. To construct programs and services to address these hardships as well as create access for migrants to aspects of mainstream American life (such as public schooling), it is important to acknowledge the logic of the actions that lead to the experiences.

Homeless and homeless again

And, even when we started to migrate as a family, I didn't complain or refuse to help out like my brother and sister would. It was before my sophomore year and it had been like a half a year that my dad had been without work. So they told us that we were going to have to go up north because Dad wasn't making any money in the valley. I had no idea what it was going to be like. So we would clean up the house, put all the furniture in one room and cover it, and board it up. After making sure that the van would make the long drive we would head up north to Ohio. We would go up to Ohio for the pickle harvest but that didn't start until July so up until then we found work picking strawberries, raspberries, and cabbage. The work itself was hard enough. We were in the fields from six in the morning until noon and then again from four until nine-thirty or ten. Man it was back breaking and it was seven days a week. And when we weren't working in the fields there was always other stuff to be done. Like helping with the laundry, going shopping, cooking, and cleaning. By the time we got home from our second stint in the fields all we would want to do is head to the community showers to get cleaned up and head back to the little houses the ranchers provided for us. I called them matchbox houses. They were always freezing at night, hot as hell during the day and so small that no matter how much you cleaned it would still be cluttered. All in all I migrated up to Ohio for three summers before coming to college. (Clara Garcia)

During Clara's freshman year in high school it became apparent to "everybody" that Clara's father was having trouble finding work as an independent carpenter and the "long and private talks" her parents had concerned what they should do. By the end of the school year her parents had settled on a solution; they were going to start migrating up north to Ohio for work. Clara, her brother, and her sister could help by going with the family and contributing towards the family income so they could "go on." That summer Clara, her mother, and her sister secured the house while Clara's father made the arrangements with the rancher who would be their employer and with the help of Clara's brother made sure the van was ready to make the trip up north. With the long trip and infrequent stops at migrant service

stations for food vouchers and gas money there was plenty of time for Clara's fears to set in. "I was, like, I was scared. I was thinking, what are we gonna do? Where are we gonna go? Where are we gonna live?"

In thinking about Clara's description of her life migrating, it might be helpful to envision the homed–homeless dichotomy through a lens analogous to the Foucauldian conceptualization of power–powerless. We suggest that such a dichotomy is an oversimplification. Rather, if homed and homeless are thought of as states reflecting different value systems, each can be understood as creating relationships that both enable and constrain choices and actions. The dichotomy of homed–homeless is supported by the white, suburban, middle-class worldview that many of us assume in which home is a commodity rather than a relationship and that is prevalent in the national policies around homelessness. There is much precedent, historically and socially, in American society for us to think in this manner. Historically, many rights we now take for granted such as voting and access to schooling were only available to those with property. There is an assumption, rooted in such history, that owning a home is a measure of success but there are larger social and historical institutional assumptions which support such images and which make it hard for us to think otherwise. There are those in social and public policy research and in educational research who value the construct of home for its physical commodity but who also look at the role of that commodity in relation to people, power, family, and values. This is an important distinction that should not be overlooked. However, we concentrate here on the relational dimension of homed/homelessness to magnify for the readers the important place of this relational stance in the lives of many migrant families. For migrants, home, if we define home as relationships rather than a thing, carries meanings equivalent to the word family, and this, in turn, shapes priorities and actions. The system of values suggested here reflects a particular worldview or lifeworld to use the terminology of Habermas (1984, 1987). Studies in constructivism, and in particular social and radical constructivism, suggest that it is important to understand the nature of worldviews as systems in which experiences, values and "states" (such as homed or homeless) are interconnected and interdependent. Lifeworld theory involves the epistemological argument that culture, beliefs, ideas, and experiences influence our understandings and actions.

If we think about both the family and the home as signifying systems of relationships, Michel Foucault's analysis of power becomes helpful to us in understanding the obviously painful choices Clara's family are making. Foucault's (1980) view is that power is not a commodity. It is "neither given, nor exchanged, nor recovered, but rather exercised, and . . . only exists in action" (Foucault, 1980, p. 89). When people interact in relationships, power comes into existence. That is, power is a productive social dynamic. In Foucault's view, it is not power that differentiates between those who possess it (e.g., people who are homed) and those "who do not have it and submit to it [for example, migrant workers and homeless people]". Rather:

Power must be analyzed as something that circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the

position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application. (Foucault, 1980, p. 98)

In Foucault's (1982) writings, a power relationship has two features. First, it requires that the person over whom power is exercised "be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts", and second, that, "faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions may open up" (p. 220). Understood in this way, an important element of any power relationship is freedom. Where action is completely constrained, one may not talk of there being a relationship of power. As Foucault (1982) states, "Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free" (p. 221). In other words, the person over whom power is being exercised (for example, the migrant worker) is also simultaneously a person who acts, and whose actions in the process transform the one exercising power. Thus, the exercising of power is never unidirectional. It is never the "province of one group and not the other" (Kincheloe, 1997, p. xxiii). Power implies the capacity to act.

If power is not a unitary force with unitary effects or unidirectional hierarchy, then we can be alert to different ways oppressed people elude control. If we are all empowered by our particular capacities and skills and we are all unempowered by our inability either to satisfy our wants and needs or express our living spirit, we begin to understand that power is exercised by both dominant and subordinate forces. (Kincheloe, 1997, p. xxvi)

In the migrant's narratives families act within external constraints imposed by economics and status and also internal constraints arising from their own values and goals. The choice to go homeless can be interpreted as the exercising of freedom (power) in the context of the dialectic power–powerless. Rather than acting within a dichotomy such as homed–homeless, these poles exist in a dialectical relationship, that is, they are relational. Seen in this way, one category is not privileged over the other as is the case under the ordinary binary system. We can then deconstruct the homed–homeless dichotomy so that the two end up, not as opposites, but as "definitionally interdependent" (Anyon, 1994, p. 119). Much as the concept "home" constructs power and choices so too does homelessness in that choosing homelessness is the exercising of freedom, and thus the construction of power (Goldberger, 1996). In other words, choosing to migrate, to be homeless, is exercising power. Families such as Clara's were exercising power when they migrated. Such exercising of power is purposeful: Clara's family went migrant as a way to maintain their family. This in turn infuses the family as a unit with power.

The goals and values that help to support the family arise from a systemic relationship, a lifeworld and are shared, understood but not always articulated by family members. Lifeworlds can be thought of as a "medium of reference" (Fairtlough, 1991), a "shared linguistic and cultural resource" (Habermas, 1984) or a "collective consciousness" (Durkheim, cited in Fairtlough, 1991). Never in the migrant's narratives do we hear them question the basic assumptions behind migrating. The children express unhappiness with the effects of migrating and the conditions they experience but no one questions the correctness of maintaining the family. In other words, lifeworlds guide interpretations for both the individual world

and the shared social world. Individuals are socialized (develop their identities and personalities and social roles) through role playing, role projection and role definition within lifeworld knowledge. In one sense, then, lifeworld is the cement for social cohesion of a social group; a shared lifeworld ensures that interpersonal relations are ordered in a way that makes groups function effectively. The implications for understanding the organization and structure provided by lifeworld are important: shared lifeworld means stabilization of group identities. For example, similarities between individuals arising from a shared lifeworld are valuable because they give rise to harmonious interpersonal relations. The social functional aspect of lifeworld “takes care of coordinating actions by means of legitimately regulated interpersonal relations and stabilizes the identity of groups to an extent sufficient for everyday practice” (Habermas, 1987, p. 140). The lifeworld of the migrant family does not exist in isolation, however. Rather it exists in a larger world in which other systems of values and assumption are apparent. Returning to Clara’s narrative with this understanding we can start to interpret some of the conflicts that assault the family and how these cause the family to continually reassert its integrity – a process emotionally loaded and full of unresolved tensions.

It was not long before Clara had answers to the questions she was asking about the migrant life. Arriving at the migrant camp Clara saw the little huts they would stay in and groups of other workers, all strangers to her. Shortly after this they were called to a meeting where the rancher explained what they were going to do, when they would get paid, and where they were going to live and that first day they went to work. With the patience of her parents, Clara was able to learn what pickles to pick and how to treat the plant while harvesting the crop. Although Clara eventually made it through that day, she felt terribly disoriented and upset:

I remember that first day I just sat down right in the middle of the road and I started crying. And to my mom I told her, “I was not born to do this.” I remember telling her, “I was not made to do this I don’t deserve to be here.” And I remember that she started crying and she said, “And you think I was?” She goes, “You think all these people were made were born to do this?” She goes, “It’s we don’t have a choice.” And I, and I remember I told my dad, “What did we do for you to make us come here?” I remember. And I felt really bad because my dad, I know my dad felt bad, you know, for taking us but, I mean, we had no other choice. That was the only way that the whole family could work. You know, provide some money for the family.

But the hardships of the work and Clara’s inner conflict between where she wanted to be and where she was became only one of the difficulties Clara faced. The family was struggling as well. The first payday caused an argument between Clara’s mother, who wanted everyone to sign over their checks to the family, and Clara’s brother and sister who wanted to keep what they had earned. As the argument escalated, Clara’s mother threatened to leave. She said she was not willing to put up with this every time they were to be paid and would rather just pack up and go back to Texas than suffer through such frustration. But Clara’s father begged her to stay and eventually she calmed down. Losing a family member would have divided the family, disintegrating the unity that was the reason they were on the road.

Recognizing that these conflicts arise not purely as a confrontation between individuals acting out of their own interests but rather as responses to a threat,

which would shatter a systemic network of values, is helpful. We can extend this to understand the hardships that occur when the family chooses to break its unity because of the incongruent demands of a discordant system. There is a sense that no choices are possible for the family that would allow them to serve their own values and goals and the individual's needs. The systemic qualities of their actions confront the systemic qualities of the other world – it is not possible to compromise and retain aspects of each; choices are all or nothing things. Stresses and strains and unhappiness occur because of discordance between two worldviews. In the next section of Clara's story we see what happens when she is sent back alone to Texas to begin school while the family stays on in the fields.

Clara's migrant status was not something that she was willing to share openly with others. Clara did not like people to know she was a migrant and judge her based on where she lived and what she and her family did. Clara felt that education was the way that she and others could prove these people wrong and she could do so by becoming "someone" through her education. She saw education as the way to give something back to her parents, be the exemplary daughter and avoid the life of migrant farmworking.

Well, I knew that if I wanted to make something of myself and not work in the fields, I had to continue my education. Actually it's kind of weird 'cause mostly everybody you talk to, you know, wants to earn money. They want to be where the money is but not me. And it's actually, it's kind of, I don't know, I think it's kind of ironic – I come from a low income family so it would be [normal] for me to have, like, this dream of being someone important and earning money, something that my parents didn't have much of. But no, to me what's most important is doing something I like and helping people, you know. . . . Or if, if you come from, um, a minority group migrating, you know, you don't really have that many alternatives if you don't have an education. So when you have an education you have so many doors open to you and you can do whatever you want.

This notion of an education and all the power that Clara grants to it as the means to become "somebody" creates further family conflict. As the time came closer and closer for school to start, all the members of the family knew that Clara would be leaving to return to Texas and study. For example, the second year Clara and her family were migrating, Clara's oldest half-sister had come with her family to visit and expressed her dismay about Clara's parents allowing her to leave the fields early to arrive at school on time.

And she would tell my mom, like, "So you're gonna let her go?" She goes, "You need her to help you out. You can't let her go. She can start school late. She's smart enough, she'll catch up," and this and that.

When her half-sister's argument seemed to convince her parents that Clara should stay in the fields and start school later, Clara's response was emotional.

And I remember I started crying. I just started . . . I just broke down and told her, like, "It's not fair. You know that! You know, I love school and I want to go back I don't want to fall behind and I take advanced classes and I can't go late because then I won't be able to take them."

But Clara's parents shared her hopes and dreams and agreed to return her to school nearly on time.

My mom told my sisters that I was gonna leave. [My parents are] like, “She’s gonna go, this is her second year, you know she’s a junior now and she just needs two more years to finish and then she’ll be she’ll be off to college and she’s gonna graduate, hopefully meet some guy at college. You know, someone successful,” and this and that.

Struggling to return to Texas in order to start school just a few weeks, rather than months, late involved facing the loneliness of being there alone – in effect returning “home” to Texas meant becoming “homeless” in the sense that now Clara was without her family. To make herself feel better and avoid the emptiness of the house between phone calls from her parents in Ohio, Clara would spend all her time in her parents’ room, sleeping or reading. “I would stay in their room I guess to feel closer to them, I would stay in their room.”

Clara acknowledges that “making something” of herself through an education was not something she could do alone. On the side of home and family it involved the conflict and sacrifice of letting an extra pair of hands leave the fields early – hands that could provide needed income for the months when work would be scarce or nonexistent. It left Clara alone and lonely when she did return to school. It caused Clara to feel alienated from both the institution of school with its impersonal, disembodied requirements and members of her own family – both those who disapproved of her “selfish” actions, and those that approved but suffered for them.

While the concept of lifeworlds is important to understand the network of values and actions that cause people to choose the life of migrating, the process of naming such an experience is also a process of creating and re-creating meaning around those realities. Creating and re-creating experience allows the holder of that experience to “theorize” her/his life in relation to others, and to see such a “confessional moment as a transformative moment – a moment of performance where you might step out of the fixed identity in which you were seen, and reveal other aspects of the self as part of an overall project of more fully becoming who you are” (hooks, 1994, p. 210). So, for example, in Clara’s narrative, naming her values and needs acknowledges the political dimension of her experience for it articulates the “labels” attached to knowledge and their sources, and allows us to place different value systems in juxtaposition to one another to challenge and transform those labels. In Clara’s story we see the effects of a system of values in confrontation with another system of values. To address the problems of homelessness for migrant workers requires understanding this conflict.

Ideas concerning the education of migrant children

To craft successful educational experiences for more than a small minority of migrant children such as Clara, we argue an understanding of their circumstances and the values systems that lead to those circumstances is important. Recent research concerning educational programs for culturally diverse and language-minority students gives us some clues. An intriguing strand of educational research has identified instructional practices that motivate, involve, challenge, and provide successful learning experiences to students from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lipka, 1991; McCarty, Wallace, Lynch, &

Benally, 1991; Montero-Seiburth & Pérez, 1987). These researchers have documented how students respond in positive ways when their teachers demonstrate sensitivity to their concerns, knowledge of their language and culture, and when they design instruction to build on culturally familiar activities. For example, Native American and Inuit children, often considered taciturn, became surprisingly animated when instructional activities paralleled those considered important within their communities (Lipka, 1991; McCarty, Wallace, Lynch, & Benally, 1991).

Other researchers, such as Lucas, Henze, and Donato (1990), tried to characterize what successful schools do when working with Latina/o immigrant children. Lucas et al. identified the successful attributes of six high schools, five in California and one in Arizona. A school's success was defined through test scores, dropout rate, and subsequent college attendance. They developed profiles for each of the successful schools and described common characteristics shared by them, observing that successful schools eschewed deficit models of instruction, and set high goals and expectations shared by students and school personnel. The school provided a variety of programs that integrated social and cultural knowledge. Moll and Gonzalez (1994) reported that teachers can improve their effectiveness with working-class Mexican-American students by identifying and incorporating into their literacy and mathematics instruction the funds of knowledge that these students' families and community members utilize in their everyday lives.

A consistent finding in research that examines the academic achievement of language-minority students is that successful teachers and schools accept students as they are, with the language that they speak at home and the value systems they live within. For example working with English as Second Language learners, schools can integrate native language instruction into their instructional programs (Carter & Chatfield, 1986; García, 1997; Lucas et al., 1990). Several researchers have focused directly on some of the ways teachers of Latina/o students actually use and support the native language (Carger, 1996; Ernst-Slavit, 1997; García, 1997; Jiménez & Gersten, 1999; Jiménez, Gersten, & Rivera, 1996; Moll, 1988; Montero-Seiburth & Perez, 1987). For example, teachers who were successful with their students recognized them as fully competent speakers of a particular variety of Spanish and worked with this. We suggest this be extended so that schools accommodate the way children live rather than assuming they live in a particular way.

Current research in education concerning children in poverty and children from other cultures speaks to larger issues: Beginning with the studies of John Ogbu in the late 1970s and Henry Trueba in the 1980s the education of immigrant children has been described as a meeting of cultures – immigrant children bring their home culture to school where they run up against the school's representation of dominant white middle-class culture. It is by understanding this meeting of cultures (or confrontation) that we can come to understand how the children become alienated and schools fail. The studies of Trueba (1988, 1989, 1990) and others (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991) seek to characterize the cultures of the immigrant Latina/o child and argue that schools need to recognize the qualities of these cultures, respect, and work within them in order to make the child's educational experience successful. But to understand or characterize these cultures, or lifeworlds, as the everyday world of human experience we must acknowledge that these are intersubjective worlds of social action (Schwandt,

1997). To do otherwise, to attribute the less than successful educational experiences of minority students solely to a mismatch between the features of home and school, ignores the importance of these social structures as a significant factor in the education of these youth (Allen & Boykin, 1992; Ludlow, 1992). Recognizing the social turns the student into one point amidst an array of social intersections that begin and end outside of school rather than an individual residing on one side of a clear-cut boundary that is culture (Nespor, 1997). The most immediate branches of this social array begin with the family and for the migrant student it is the family moving together that constructs both conflict and harmony in an everyday world of instability and struggle that transcends any material conception of place. Home does not exist in physical or perhaps even conceptual space but rather within these familial relationships fluctuating geographically (space), emotionally (strength), and politically (power) that dichotomies such as home-school or homed-homeless cannot capture. It is a lifeworld that moves literally from state to state as well as more figuratively between homed to homeless amidst these relationships.

Along similar lines Moll (1992) observed that the Mexican-American community is influenced by "funds of knowledge," a term originally used by Velez-Ibañez (1988) to describe the varying knowledge skills and networks that are used by family members for accomplishing different tasks and purposes. Narratives such as Clara, Juan, and Hector's suggest that to be successful social services such as schooling need to take into account the intertwining of these funds of knowledge with the physical circumstances of these children's lives and recognize that both come out of a system of deeply held values. Far from being unconcerned with the learning of their children, we can see from our stories that parents are very concerned with the discordance between their systems of values and the assumptions of the surrounding culture. Researchers have reported that parents from minority communities, particularly immigrant families, are highly motivated to support their children's efforts in schools (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991, 1992; Goldenberg, 1987; Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1991; Valdés, 1996; Vasquez, Pease-Alvarez, & Shannon, 1994) but to support their children in schools requires choosing one system of values over their own. Both Lucas et al. (1990), and Romo & Falbo (1996) found that Mexican-American high school students were more inclined to drop out of school because of school practices, not parental influences. Different views of what is proper or adequate involvement often separate teachers and parents. We suggest some sort of mutual negotiation and compromise. McConnell (1989), for example, demonstrated how migrant students in Texas were able to increase their academic achievement when program administrators hired parents as teacher aids. Such a compromise addresses parental and family needs and seems a simple way to bridge the two worlds.

Specific studies of migrant education are very few and primarily embedded in studies of the network of social services provided for migrant agricultural workers since the mid-1960s. These include: *Services for migrant children in the health, social services, and education systems*, by Pindus, Schulte & Webb, commissioned by The Urban Institute in 1993; *Children of La Frontera: Binational efforts to serve mexican migrant and immigrant students*, edited by Judith LeBlanc Flores (1996); and *Fields of toil: a migrant family's journey*, by Isabel Valle (1994). Lopez, Scribner, and Mahitivanichcha (2001) have noted that schools that successfully involve migrant farmworking parents in the education of their children recognize the social and

economic needs of this group. They attempt to meet these needs on a daily and ongoing basis rather than following a regimented list of parental involvement considerations. This involves a significant redefinition of parental involvement where the school and home come to each other and includes what is termed “home involvement” which centers, in part, on helping better familial circumstances. Thus, “home” turns into something synonymous with family and is not temporary or dissolving with a move north but extends beyond space, time, and the academic year. The school’s involvement with the home, or family, is a continuous interaction allowing it to become aware of and meet the shifting needs of the family. As an example, one particular school district serving migrant families coordinated with public and private institutions to offer sewing and cake-painting classes aimed at providing enrolled individuals with the means for economic self-improvement. Not only is this a way to help meet the economic needs of the family, but the socially embedded nature of these families within a network of families is fully appreciated and encouraged. Part of the participant’s obligation includes training at least 15 more parents in their newly acquired skill. Finally, in order to help these parents gain employment while absent from the district, the school is willing to send a certificate of completion for the class to a potential employer. In a similar fashion, Trevino (2000) noted that although the parents of high-achieving migrant students are not hesitant about advocating for their children in school, they are also involved in daily academic support activities at home that are not based in school. This suggests that what is needed is a more balanced notion of what it means to be involved in a child’s education centering on the family.

Conclusion

Theorizing family and home through the constructs, power, and lifeworld enables us to see how family and home and the experiences that emanate from them are situated in a complexity of intertwining value systems. This situatedness leads to embedded relationships between human beings, their resources, perceptions, and environment. In fields such as sociology and anthropology as well as education, social work, and nursing – fields concerned with understanding people and cultures – lifeworld is a powerful construct because it emphasizes the contextually dependent relationships between physical and social settings and resources (Agre & Horswill, 1997; Dahiberg & Drew, 1997; Roth, 2000; Roth & McRobbie, 1999; Walters, 1995). The idea of lifeworld suggests that, to be helpful, social services such as education need to be situationally conditional and responsive. For example, Dahiberg (Dahiberg & Drew, 1997) expresses the importance for the nurse to have a sense of patients’ whole contextual being in order to promote awareness and wellness. Arguments in social work concerning child labor (Siddiqi & Patrinos, no date) revolve around understanding the child as part of the entire economic system of the family. If we move this discussion into the schools and the education of migrant worker children, we can understand that services and programs should address the entire family and not look purely at the individual student.

The construct lifeworld embodies personal/cultural/familial landscapes and the politics of how these spaces shape and are shaped by relationships. The idea of schooling as a responsive act towards children’s life experiences or lifeworlds would suggest that we need to understand and accommodate these relationships. For

example, the physical homelessness of agricultural migrant workers is the result of a multitude of converging factors from economics to family values to ability to opportunities. Ideas, beliefs, actions, and experiences are rooted in an intertwinement of material and social practices and actors. This in turn takes us back to the migrant workers' conceptualizations of themselves, which is intrinsically about their conceptualization of home and family.

We introduced this paper describing different ideas about home: home as a place or home as a relationship between people. We argue that for migrant workers home is synonymous with family. The migrant workers are homeless in the sense of place in order to maintain their lived home – their family. Realizing this causes us to understand how many societal institutions in the United States assume the first definition of home and by doing so disrupt the migrant worker family – they break the worker's "home" by insisting on a connection to place. In many ways migrant workers are forced into "homelessness." Many of them left home when they left Mexico. They leave "home" again in a cultural sense when they leave the Spanish-speaking communities in which they have lived within the United States, and when we ask them to break the family structure to go to school or for some other purpose we cause individuals to become homeless in a most fundamental way – an emotional rootlessness. We think that once we acknowledge other images of "home" and the values and priorities that follow, policies and services for migrant workers and their children might take a different form. These might then serve our purposes (such as education) and their purposes (such as preserving the family) better. When policies and institutions ask a migrant family to choose between what they value (family) and what we value any good intended is undermined.

Notes

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2. In our presentation of the stories, we combine quotes with third-person narratives constructed from the students' words. It is important to note that the evaluative words in the third-person narratives are the students' not the researchers.

3. Detasseling refers to the process of removing the pollen-producing parts of the corn plant so that the genetic heritage of seed corn can be controlled. This has to be done by hand for each corn plant.

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