Luchamos Juntos! We Struggle Together! Organizing for Education with the Farmworker Community

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Abstract

This study examines the emerging process of participation and activism of Mexican and Mexican American migrant farmworkers in the schooling of their children through their narratives and oral histories, contextualized in selected schools and rural communities of Southern California. Equitable and participatory collaborations between migrant parents and their children's school personnel hold the potential to benefit school achievement among these students, a population whose school performance has historically lagged substantially behind their peers. This study addresses the following questions: What are the dispositions, interactions, events and contexts that support the participation, advocacy, and activism of migrant farm worker parents in the schooling of their children?

Keywords: *Migrant Education; Community Education; Community Organizing*

Introduction

This study examines the emerging process of participation, advocacy, and activism of migrant farmworker parents in their children's schooling, contextualized in selected schools and communities in Southern California. This ethnographic study explores dispositions, interactions, and interventions that facilitate these parents' participation and promote stronger school-family partnerships. Increased equitable and participatory collaborations between migrant parents and their children's school personnel hold the potential to benefit school achievement among these students, a population whose school performance has historically lagged substantially behind their peers (Migrant Education Program, 2018; Jasis and Marriott, 2010; Nuñez, 2009). Through their narratives, parents, caregivers, and community advocates chronicle and analyze their process of activism and specific events, interactions, and dispositions that impact power

relationships within and outside schools to support the education of migrant children. This study addresses the following question: What are the dispositions, interactions, interventions, events, and contexts that support the participation, advocacy, and activism of migrant farmworker parents and families in the schooling of their children?

California Migrant Farmworkers: Their Status, their Children

Southern California is a land of dramatic socio-economic and cultural contrasts between diverse communities, where an abundance of wealth thrives next to pockets of extreme poverty. The manicured lawns of some of the nation's wealthiest counties stand as a stark contrast to the extreme poverty of agricultural communities located a few miles from these urban and suburban centers. This expansive Pacific coast and

inland desert region live a sizable portion of the estimated 650,000 California *Jornaleros* /Spanish for migrant seasonal farmworkers (EDD, 2019). They help tend over a million acres of regional farmland, sustaining the area's vibrant agricultural economy, ranging from dairy farms and field crops to nursery products and floriculture. The extraordinary development of the state's agribusiness over generations often disguises the harsh realities of life among farmworker families and communities: 96% of the area's agricultural workforce is Latino/a, of which 92% are of Mexican origin or ancestry (Rodriguez, Toller, & Dowling, 2003; Martin, 2016). Farm work is associated with the highest poverty rate of any occupation; 61% of all California's migrant workers live in poverty (NAWS, 2016). For the children of seasonal farm laborers, the situation is significantly bleaker; by the time a migrant child is 12, he/she may work the fields 16-18 hours per week, leaving little time for schoolwork (SAF, 2011). Poor education, economic, health, and harsh working conditions contribute to higher dropout rates and lower academic achievement (Zalaquett, McHatton, & Cranston-Gingras, 2007; California Department of Education, 2007; LaCroix, 2007). According to data from the Migrant Education Program (2017), 91% of migratory students in this expansive area are not meeting state performance standards, with 66% scoring below math, reading, and writing standards.

Moreover, 76% of them lack knowledge in mathematical concepts, critical areas required for local in-demand job prospects (California Department of Education, 2017). Among secondary school students, migrant students impacted by adverse socio-economic circumstances are the least likely to graduate from high school, take college prep coursework, and enroll in college (Kindler, 2002; Nuñez, 2009; Velazquez, 1996). The children of migrant farmworker families are at risk of various debilitating exposures such as child labor, family separation, depression, and anxiety that far exceed the general population and their non-migratory Latino peers (Migrant Education Program, 2017; Kupersmidt, 1997). Recent educational data reveal that these negative factors are also compounded by the highest rate of English learners among migrant youth - 81% by grade 3-, and a prevalent "culture of migrancy" (Bughra and Becker, 2005), which describes them as most in need for urgent and specialized targeted support (Migrant Education Program, 2017; Taylor & Ruiz, 2017; Grinding & Poggio, 2009). In the words of Perry (1997), "with so many obstacles in the path of their educational success, rural migrant students may be the most disadvantaged student population in America" (as in Romanowsky, 2010, p.27).

The bleak educational and life indicators of migrant children point towards more comprehensive, precisely targeted, and culturally appropriate strategies to address this student population's specific challenges. The needs and strengths of migrant students have been the focus of educational researchers, practitioners, and advocates over several decades, who have identified core challenges that, if corrected, can address migrant students' disadvantaged status and improve their chances to succeed academically. Among the most salient factors potentially impacting the school achievement of migrant children is the need to create and strengthen partnerships between school personnel and the student's families (Branz-Spall et al., 2003; Jasis and Marriott, 2010; Lundy-Ponce, 2010; Lam, 1997; NCBE, 2001; Salinas, 2007; US Department of Education, 2006). This study focuses on a selected group of migrant farmworker parents who have become activists and advocates for the improved education of migrant students.

Parent Organizing towards School-Family Partnerships

There is an emerging scholarship focusing on the school and community-based activism of parents and caregivers from low-income communities of color, which has become particularly relevant since the early 2000s (Jasis and Ordoñez-Jasis, 2005; Lareau, 1994; Warren and Mapp, 2011). Recent literature suggests an increased interest in initiatives to strengthen family-school partnerships from education scholars and practitioners alike to improve students' school experience from historically under-served communities (Fennimore, 2017; Funkhouser and Gonzalez, 1997; Worg, 2011). Several of these studies examine local experiences of community empowerment, exploring how – and to what extent – a process of parent organizing and increased participation in school communities holds the potential of reversing generations of unequal relations between families of color and school personnel, improving education for all students (Cattone, Chung, and Oh, 2011; Rogers, 2011; Warren and Mapp, 2011). Low-income families' engagement in their children's schooling often occurs in contexts of poverty and unequal balances of power between school institutions and historically underserved communities (Auerbach, 2007; Jasis, 2019; Lareau, 2012; Warren and Mapp, 2011).

Community struggles for meaningful education, and more specifically parent organization around schooling, are not new, and they have been at the heart of historical movements for civil rights, as they are powerful tools for social change (Cooper, 2009; Delgado Gaitan, 2004; Fraga and Frost, 2011; Jasis and Jasis-Ordoñez, 2005; Orr and Rogers, 2011; Warren, 2011).

Methods

This study is an ethnographic exploration of the diverse motivations, rationales, and socio-cultural contexts of the process of advocacy and activism among a group of migrant farmworker parents in Southern California. It examines their individual and their collective narratives and personal reflections that fuel their school and community-based engagement in their children's schooling and the life of their community. This effort reflects the selected proceedings of over a hundred hours of on-site observations at migrant parent meetings, as well as twenty hours of interviews with participant farmworker parents. The resulting data –most of it originally in Spanish – was transcribed, organized thematically, and translated by the author, and then shared with the informants for increased accuracy and accountability.

For this study, the positionality of the author is that of a participant observant. Weiss said (1998), this stance involves participation by the investigator during the processes, activities, and events examined "as a way to get close to the action, and get a feel for what things mean to the actors" (p. 257). The author's personal history and experiences as a Latino immigrant and an educator provide intrinsic familiarity with the activities and issues presented in this study. As a long-time education activist with the migrant community, the author knows many core issues impacting the participants' lives. However, throughout this exploration, his "first priority is the observation," as emphasized by Weiss (1998), to capture and analyze events and processes "with all its emotional aura" (p.57). This ethnographic approach is informed by Ghans (1962). They explored the vagaries of life and its deeper meanings and informants' social contexts by eliciting the reflections, feelings, and daily activities from his voluntary informants. The participants were interviewed

and observed in their preferred milieu. In the schools their children attend, during student advocacy meetings, at community events, or in locations they choose.

Participation in this ethnographic study was voluntary and involved ten families, identified here with pseudonyms, which were interviewed individually and collectively. This approach involved purposeful sampling, which in the words of Weiss (1998), is useful when the researcher "is interested in data not just on average participants" but on a specific set of informants. This determination is vital because school-based activism among migrant parents is an emerging and dynamic phenomenon. It is so new that most migrant parents have yet to engage. However, this community's highly motivated and growing segment takes leadership and supporting roles among this historically underserved working population.

The informants in this study were selected using the following criteria: a) being a migrant farm worker parent or caregiver with children in public K-12 schools, b) participating in an organized parent group or program advocating for enhanced migrant student schooling, and c) familiarity with the issues, strengths, and challenges facing the migrant population. Their narratives are examined as *testimonials* (Beverley, 2005). This approach validates everyday subjects' reflections and understands them as critical units of analysis, with the potential of capturing the meanings of socio-cultural and political junctures. Bertaux and Kohli (1984) posed that oral narratives such as these can potentially encapsulate complex socio-historical and ideological processes along these lines. Close to the ethnographic stance adopted throughout this study, they see these oral narratives as valuable tools to examine the participants' dispositions and motivations and inquire into their implications within larger social and pedagogical contexts. At the same time, Osterling (2001) poses that local

communities should be seen as critical sources and valuable assets for their revitalization and growth with their histories and struggles.

Migrant Parents Becoming Education Activists

Pedro García is a solidly built farmworker who grew up on a small ranch in Central Mexico's highlands. He remembers a small rural school near his childhood home, which offered instruction up to the fifth grade and, most importantly, a simple lunch ("almuerzo") every weekday around 11:30 in the morning. It also had a stringent set of teachers, one of whom often hit young Pedro with a ruler if he talked out of order, did not finish the homework on time, or forgot to bring a notebook and pencil to school. It did not matter to that teacher that the rancher, who owned most of the local land, demanded that little Pedro milk the cows, feed the animals, clean up the stables, or help with the crops often before heading to school early in the morning. The school's demands were the same. It is no wonder then that some of his early schooling memories are not very pleasant or that he dropped out midway into the third grade. Mr. Aguilar is 46 years old now, but by the time he migrated to the California fields three decades ago, his main concern was not schooling – it was survival. Survival meant finding a paying job in agriculture and putting a roof over his head. After having worked 12 to 14 hours daily for over thirty years, often migrating through countless farms and ranches spanning many coastal areas of the Western states, Mr. García, the proud father of three, has now a very distinct view of the importance of education.

> I don't ever want my kids to work as hard as I have to. And to make sure they understand how important it is to be good students, do their homework, and respect their teachers, I take them to work with me at least once in the

summer for the whole day twice a year, picking up lettuce, cutting lemons from trees, picking oranges and tomatoes. I see them sweating, see their hands bleed, feel their head getting hot from the sun, and not making much money from all of that at the end of the day. Then I tell them: Now you go and study to get a better life.

Mr. García and his wife Elodia do not limit themselves to reminding their children every day about the importance of school and homework. They also advocate strongly for them and other migrant students at their school. For three years now, the Garcías have become active participants in a group of migrant parents sponsored by their local branch of the Migrant Education Program (MEP). Mrs. García is also an MEP regional leader, elected to represent migrant parents like herself and her husband at state-wide meetings. Educational and organizing strategies to support farmworker families are discussed for implementation at the local level. She is also studying independently to graduate from a high school equivalency program to share the importance of education with her children.

Today, at a small meeting attended by nine migrant parents and grandparents, Mrs. García remembers her introduction to educational advocacy in the following terms:

> I did not know anything about helping my children at school, sometimes I would attend school functions, but I did not know what they were talking about and how important they really were. Then a *comadre* of mine commented to me about how the *programa* (MEP) helped her daughters, and that motivated me. There I learned a lot, made good friendships, and began to talk more at the meetings.

As Mrs. García became more engaged in activism, terms such as "outreach," "policies," "budget," and "outcomes," or their close translation in Spanish, also became more familiar to her in her interactions with school personnel and, just as importantly, with fellow parent advocates. Mrs. García often works beside her husband in the local fields to make ends meet, but she still makes a point of attending –and often leading- as many school-based and community-based parent meetings as possible. She also collaborates with other migrant parents in supporting activities that do not require in-person meetings. These collaborations include creating and updating a phone tree to communicate to all students' families, organizing potlucks and childcare for adult education classes, and reaching out to families in need when jobs are scarce and local conditions deteriorate. A vivid example of the latter was a food and protective gear collection effort she helped organize with other parents when massive wildfires decimated California's rural areas. During this time, farmworkers worked every one of those hazy days to feed their families. She is confident that her children, a set of twin boys in middle school and a girl in second grade, are doing better in school because of their advocacy and her increasingly stronger connections to the schools' teachers. She states her case in the following terms:

> I think that my children's teachers are listening to me better now, and I understand them better, too. We got to know and respect each other more now; we do activities together when we can; I know now how to support their work, how to help my children and other families.

Mariela Cruz, a young mother in attendance at the local MEP meeting, is a new participant in this advocacy group. Her son, a second-grader who is a special needs student, is often supported by an in-classroom aide,

which helped him make notable academic progress. She adds a unique perspective to the conversation:

> My son is being helped right now, but I know there are other services he should have, but I need to request them. Being part of this group of parents helped me find out more about the services and to ask for them *con más ganas* (more forcefully).

The struggle of mainstream families with special needs children to access educational and support services from schools and school districts is well documented (Wright, 2017). However, Mrs. Cruz believes that the quest for services is challenging because she is a farmworker, and her situation is not always understood by school personnel.

> People at the school don't know about the problems we face each day. I am a single mother, and I don't have a car, so I depend on the school bus for my son to go to school; and also, because of my schedule at the nursery where I work, I cannot attend most school meetings. My mom helps me when she can, but she can't go to speak to the teacher most afternoons.

Mrs. Cruz is confident that her emerging advocacy with migrant parents is already making a positive difference. When she needs to make her case for additional support for her son, she is equipped with more information. Mrs. Cruz now interacts with teachers, administrators, or other school personnel as part of a larger and more organized parent group. She shares that she also counts on her migrant parent peers when she needs to convey a message to school personnel and cannot be there in person.

Parent to parent solidarity, particularly among migrant mothers, is a theme that resonates strongly among these participants. Fabiola Troncoso is a mother of two students at the local elementary school, a fifth-grade girl and a third-grade boy. Her husband is a ranch worker on a farm almost a hundred miles away, and as a spouse of a farmworker, she is also considered a migrant parent. Since she stays at home raising the children, she sees herself as a communicator for a larger and, at times, hard-to-reach group of migrant parents.

> I have a bit more time at home than many of the other *compañeras* (partners, companions) here, so when we or the school organize an activity, I am the one who calls many of the parents that work all day, live in ranches far from here, and cannot go to the school or talk to the teachers. Sometimes the kids don't tell their parents about the meetings, so I sit down with the *reclutadora* (recruiter), and we go over the list to see who has not been coming to the *juntas* (meetings), and we call them or send them the information any way we can.

These parents meet regularly at the small local office of the Migrant Education Program. At these meetings, every other Saturday morning, and between sips of coffee and bites of fresh Mexican pastries, the participants have an opportunity to share their concerns, suggestions, initiatives, events, and activities taking place at the schools their children attend. Often their concerns and achievements mirror the issues faced by many other migrant parents across the state, which are discussed and acted upon at larger events with the local representation of parents such as Elodia García. She reflects on her participation at regional migrant parents' meetings:

> It is really important to share with other families the conversations we have here. One can get a lot of information from the larger meetings; I love going there when I can. But the most important thing is to make sure that many other

families that don't even know about migrant programs come and join us. It's the only way to make things better for our children.

Her insight also resonates in the reflections of Alicia and Adrián Alcázar, a middle-aged couple who are active participants at all parent meetings in this area. They have, over the years, advocated for the educational rights and opportunities of migrant children and students with special needs in their local district. MEP has been actively recruiting and training parents such as the Alcázars towards more significant educational equity with these families.

> In the beginning, it was only about getting services for our youngest boy, and then we realized that most immigrant parents like ourselves didn't know what their rights were, and they were getting ignored by schools. Although we both work full time, we decided to dedicate time to inform other families about their rights to ask, or even demand, a good education for their children.

Alejandro Martínez, an experienced organizer and educator, working for MEP, is a vital force in the local efforts at organizing migrant parents in Southern California. He sees the process of migrant parent advocacy with a measured yet enthusiastic perspective.

> Ours is a population that faces many obstacles, such as isolation, marginalization, poverty, limited English language skills, and also lack of experience when it comes to advocating for themselves and their families. On top of that, many of them face immigration status issues and have to live in an environment of anti-immigrant sentiments. And even in that situation, they still fight for their children, and I can tell you that we are making a lot of progress together!

During our conversation, Mr. Martínez adds that, even with all of the progress made, there are thousands of eligible migrant families with children in K-12 grades nationwide that their program has yet to reach. In the words of Mr. Martínez,

> There are many barriers to the school success of migrant children, and an essential tool to make these activities successful is parent-to-parent support and solidarity.

The Workings of Solidarity

There are diverse notions of solidarity in the literature. For example, Durkheim (as in Kolers, 2017) loosely defined social solidarity as collective conscience and as "the bonds that tie us together" (p. 2). However, Kolers' also suggested that the idea of solidarity somehow undermines individual agency, posing that collective solidarity can override one's conscience and sense of individual autonomy. In contrast to this view, the process of collective solidarity emerging among these migrant parent activists, as illustrated here, is overtly conscious and motivated by their agency. Their notion of solidarity is closer to Tishner (1981), who describes it as an *ethics of conscience.* Tishner argues a sense of solidarity awakens the "goodwill in people" and also that it is essentially born out of the establishment of a "reliable dialogue" (p. 42). which "grows out as an assumption that must be accepted –explicitly or implicitly- by both sides: neither you nor I can learn the truth about each other if we remain distanced from one another, closed inside the walls of our fears" (p. 42).

Among these migrant parent-activists, they opt to engage in a community quest, actively working towards a positive vision of the collective future. They clearly understand that their work and emerging activism, as well as their daily support for one another, are the most effective means of achieving a meaningful education for

their children and their best shot at disrupting generational cycles of poverty. These dispositions exemplify Mr. García's societal value of education and his parental lessons to his children about work and life. Additionally, the regional advocacy of Elodia García, the committed activism of Mrs. Cruz, and the quiet, behind-the-scenes work of Mrs. Troncoso are commendable and assist the cause greatly. The program's recruiter regularly reaches out to migrant families living in remote ranches to inform them about events and meetings at their children's schools as well.

Their reflections and actions indicate their individual choice towards collective action. They should be understood as a commitment towards cooperative action and public engagement in their children's education. They connect solidly with the views of Marion and Rogers (2011), as they advocate for increased civic involvement in schooling: "Public engagement is about translating shared interests into deliberate collective efforts to promote educational equality" (p. 10). They also pose that collective, community-based work such as the one described here requires "collective thinking, and an understanding of interdependence" (p.10). Low-income communities and families rely on that *interdependence* for survival, especially in challenging times. Furthermore, these are, indeed, challenging times; these parents' committed advocacy stands against a backdrop of increased hostility towards immigrant communities, where these families are often seen in official spheres with suspicion and animosity and even as undeserving of any educational or social services (Orr and Rogers, 2011).

The activism of these migrant parents also emerges in response to a historical legacy of marginalization and lack of political power—this lack of power results from their sparse representation at the local and regional political levels. Their non-inclusive

composition of many school boards, school administration, academia, and lack of representative voices in other educational and social institutions with decision-making in school policy also affects their status (Jasis and Ordonez-Jasis, 2005; Marion and Rogers, 2011). Within this challenging context, the emerging process of activism among a group of migrant parent activists is an indication of how low-income communities have, over generations, learned to strengthen their common bonds of solidarity. This is a committed engagement, which is ethically informed by a pragmatic and hopeful approach to solidarity, a moral stance where, as Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (2014) posed decades ago, "there is no true solidarity without hope" (p. 63). In sum, their organizing work is strongly motivated by a sense of communal solidarity, informed by a hopeful vision of a better future for their children-the children beyond their immediate families, all migrant children, and all the community's children.

Impacting Schools, Impacting Lives

Several recent studies have focused on the potential of community organizing work to positively alter the relationships between diverse families and schools, particularly in contexts of unequal educational opportunities for low-income communities and communities of color (Fennimore, 2017; Jasis and Ordonez-Jasis, 2005; Jasis and Marriott, 2010; Warren and Mapp, 2011; Worg, 2011). As underserved communities develop increased agency and voice, they can impact social and educational policies at the local level, advancing their dynamics of grassroots participation in the process, articulating what Lichterman (1996) calls their unique "grammar of democracy." Recent literature also illustrates how families who had been socially and politically marginalized, and often weary of social activism, can develop a significant

capacity to mobilize when it comes to fighting for their children's schooling and towards a better collective future (Fraga and Frost, 2011; Hong, 2011; Jasis and Marriott, 2010).

At the local and regional levels, activist engagement of low-income parents in schools is supported by non-profit coalitions, grassroots parent organizations, and community activists in many locations across the nation. This support advances the community's expertise and efficacy towards educational inclusion and equity for all students (Ishimaru and Takahashi, 2011; Martinez-Cossio, 2010; Jasis and Ordonez Jasis, 2005). As illustrated through the reflections and actions of the migrant parents in this study, the capacity of community organizing to change the educational landscape towards increased equity can make a difference where it matters: at the local level. In the words of Warren and Mapp (2011), "organizing groups can help build a political constituency with the power to demand school improvement and hold systems accountable" (p. 5).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The interactions and dispositions examined here vividly describe the pedagogic potentials -and indeed, the urgency- to establish more substantial and more equitable partnerships between migrant families and schools to support the school experience of migrant students. The activism process among these parents, emerging amid a challenging socio-economic and cultural environment, demonstrates the value these families place on their children's education and the strong bonds of solidarity that contextualize their collective commitment to their children's future. These migrant parent activists emphasized the need to support schools' work any way they can throughout these observations and conversations. The parents'

determination to dedicate all necessary time and efforts to strengthen their bonds of solidarity and engage with teachers and administrators to improve their children's school experience and academic outcomes is of utmost importance. To do so, they need a more substantial commitment from schools to understand and respect their context and strengths and engage with them to fulfill their joint vision of educational improvement.

The opportunities to build stronger partnerships between schools and migrant families hold the promise of meaningful education and a brighter future for migrant students. Moreover, *partnerships*, in the words of Little (2011), "can serve to strengthen, support, and even transform individual partners, resulting in improved program quality, more efficient use of resources, and better alignment of goals and curricula" in schools (p. 1). Partnerships, in this context, also require an *empowerment approach* (Jasis, 2019), that is, a commitment to an equal, inclusive understanding of issues, an honest inquiry about the strengths and challenges of each partner, and a shared vision of success for all students. In practical terms, and based on the conversations with this group of migrant parents, schools and school districts should consider these initiatives: a) Identify students from migrant farmworker backgrounds as early as possible, to allow parents and caregivers to connect their families to the programs and services available to them, as well as to contact their peer support networks: b) School personnel should be comprehensively informed and sensitized about the cultural assets, as well as the socio-economic strengths and challenges of the farmworker families and communities: c) A stronger partnership should be established between schools and the Migrant Education Program (MEP), as well as with informal parent networks, to maximize opportunities for migrant parents to receive critical information, and meet independently

with transportation, appropriate translation and childcare when needed: d) Migrant parents should be provided increased opportunities for quality participation in their children's schooling. Creating opportunities for these families means addressing the logistical challenges they face by planning for modified school events and meetings to take place when the parents' work schedules allow for them, with an understanding of the migrant nature of agricultural work, with its specific seasonal requirements and limitations: and e) Diverse programs serving the needs of migrant families, as well as farmworker organizations, should provide opportunities to support the visibility and efficacy of the migrant parent's voices in education and society, including training in leadership development, public speaking, and a comprehensive program of awareness regarding the educational rights of all students. There is excellent pedagogical potential in the commitment, dedication, work ethics, and ingenuity of the migrant family. It is up to us, education practitioners and scholars, to tap into this great reservoir of opportunity and talent to support the success of migrant students in our schools.

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Migrant students and College Assistance Migrant Programs: A promising pathway to higher education success

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Abstract

Migrant students continue to face challenging obstacles to complete their post-secondary education and their needs and successes are still widely unknown. The present article compares the results, in terms of retention and graduation, of migrant students in a CAMP program to other students in similar institutions. Using a series of independent samples T-tests, the outcomes of students are compared and potential characteristics of successful students are also identified. The results reveal a promising positive outcome in favor of CAMP programs. These results may have implications for institutions serving migrant students, and others labeled first generation, low SES, ethnic minorities.

Keywords: *Migrant education; Multicultural education; Education policy*

Introduction

Migrant education may be one of the least familiar areas of early elementary to post-secondary education. Even though the migrant education program started in the 1960s, after Edward Murrow's (1960) documentary 'Harvest of Shame' drew attention to the living conditions of seasonal and farm workers, the needs and talents of migrant students go largely unrecognized. In fact, these students have been defined as "invisible" (Nuñez, 2009; Ramirez, 2012) and, to this day, they have the lowest performance group as measured by standardized tests, the highest dropout rate (Green, 2003; Ramirez, 2012), and the least likelihood of attending college (Garza et al., 2004).

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)(2015), under Title I part C, and the Higher Education Act (HEA), under Subpart 5, Special Programs for Students Whose Families Are Engaged in Migrant and Seasonal Farm work, designed programs with the attempt to serve migrant students. Often confused with immigrant students, migrant students are defined as students that have moved within a given time frame, across state or school district lines with or to join a migrant parent or guardian who is seeking to obtain qualifying temporary or seasonal employment in agriculture, fishing, or dairy. These are the defining terms of a migrant student as described in both ESSA and HEA.

Today, the Migrant Education Program (MEP), in K-12 education, serves over 500,000 children in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia (DC). Although the program was established in the 1960s, there have not been many significant changes other than definitions, priority of services, and funding allocations. These allocation changes are basically focused on the distribution of payments for both educational and health services provided to migrant students by school districts on a supplemental basis. MEP's goal, as outlined in ESSA, is to ensure that migrant students receive a high-

quality and comprehensive education that minimizes the potential negative effects of the life-conditions of migrant families that move frequently between or within states.

Given the lack of successful transition of migrant students to higher education, in 1967 the HEA authorized the provision of funds for High Equivalency Programs (HEP) to assist qualifying, current and former migrant students to obtain a secondary school diploma. In 1972, the College Assistance Migrant Programs (CAMP) were created to ensure the placement, persistence and retention of migrant students in post-secondary education (US Department of Education [USDE], 2020).

The establishment of these federally funded CAMP grants proved to be necessary. The challenges and disadvantages of migrant students have been well documented. Included among these barriers are the constant adjustment to new environments, cultural differences, language skills not supported or valued at schools, low income, and lack of integration in the communities in which migrant students temporarily reside (Ramirez, 2012; Zalaquett et al., 2007). These same challenges persist, or are exacerbated, in post-secondary education. Migrant students share some of the characteristics of students considered most vulnerable. They are identified as low socio-economic status students, emerging bilinguals, and first-generation students and they face additional challenges including lack of college preparatory coursework and low college access tests' scores (Garza et al., 2004; Ramirez, 2012). This combination of barriers makes them invisible to most of the higher education world.

CAMP is a grant program developed to mitigate the disadvantages migrant students have and ensure the success of this population in their higher education journey. Today, approximately 2,000 migrant students receive services from this program annually which include counseling, tutoring, academic skills[2] workshops, financial aid stipends, health services, and housing assistance to eligible students during their first year of college (USDE, 2018). There are currently 54 CAMPs at IHEs across the United States including Puerto Rico (HEP CAMP Association, 2020).

A number of qualitative studies have explored the experiences of migrant students at CAMP programs, but there is not much quantitative evidence of the results of the programs in terms of retention and college program completion. Previous research has shown that attending a 4-year institution increases the likelihood of completing a postsecondary degree, however, migrant students have a higher representation in community colleges (Nuñez, 2009). Given this context, the present study addresses the following overarching question: Are students in CAMP more likely to graduate compared to other students attending community colleges? To answer this question, data has been collected for over 10 years at a community college CAMP known as BUENO CAMP. These data are used to answer the follow research questions:

a) Are there statistically significant differences on BUENO CAMP student graduation rates compared to all Acre Community College students, and statewide Community Colleges' students?

b) How are BUENO CAMP migrant students doing in higher education in comparison to other populations in the state?

c) What are the preponderant characteristics of successful students in the CAMP program?

This study tracks and compares the results, in terms of degree completion, of migrant students to the results of non-migrant students in community colleges in

the same state. The results reveal a surprising outcome in favor of migrant students. But, before delving into the details of the present research, we will discuss the historical and socio-political context of migrant education in higher education and the findings from previous literature about the characteristics and success of migrant students in higher education.

Historical and Policy Perspectives of Migrant Education in Higher Education

The CAMP is a federally funded grant program created in 1972 to assist students of families who work in migratory or seasonal farmworkers to enroll in their first year of undergraduate studies at an Institution of Higher Education (IHE). These were a non-competing program until 1982 when they were transferred to the United States Department of Education, Office of Migrant Education and offered as competitive grants to states and their funding was increased (Quezada et al., 2017). Even though each CAMP has their own goals and objectives and they their own unique implementation plan to meeting those objectives, eligibility for CAMP services remains the same across the country.

A qualified applicant must meet one of the following criteria established by the Office of Migrant Education. The applicant or their immediate family members must have engaged in migrant or seasonal farm work for 75 days within the last 24 months or; they have participated or been eligible to participate in the Title 1C Migrant Education program or; they have qualified for the Workforce Investment Act 167 (HEP CAMP Association, 2020). Finally, each applicant must be a US citizen or a Permanent Resident to qualify for CAMP services. If the applicant meets these criteria they would be eligible to participate but each CAMP has their own means of determining merit for their eligible applicants that they choose to accept in the program. It is

encouraged by the Office of Migrant Education that each CAMP "develop and implement a plan for identifying, informing, and recruiting eligible participants who are most in need of the academic and supporting services and financial assistance provided by the project" (Education Department General Administrative Regulations, Section 206.20).

As with other federal programs, CAMP is subject to the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) of 1993. The current GPRA measures and targets set for all CAMPs are (1) 86% of CAMP participants complete the first academic year of their postsecondary program, and (2) 90% of CAMP participants continue their postsecondary education beyond their first year (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The CAMP program was not changed significantly in the comprehensive reauthorization of the HEA in 2008. The changes in HEA have been limited to minor modifications and refinements and there has not been extensive reform of the program since it was approved in 1972. The work of CAMP programs is considered essential in order to facilitate the access of migrant students to higher education.

Literature review
Who are our migrant students in CAMP programs?

According to the most recent data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (2018), the percentage of hired farmworkers from Mexican origin is 57% and the total from Latinx background is 64%. For crop laborers, those percentages are even higher as only 25% are reported to be White or non-Hispanic. Crop laborers have also the lowest level of educational attainment, as 52% lack a high school diploma (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2018). There is no official record to ascertain the demographic characteristics of CAMP students. In order to qualify for the CAMP program,

applicants or their immediate family members must have engaged in migrant or seasonal farm-work. The demographics of these students must be similar, except for the educational attainment. In fact, Willison and Jang (2009) argued that, because of the lack of credible data on the enrollment of MSFW students in post-secondary education, it was beneficial to acknowledge that they are a subgroup of the students identified as Latinx. Those students who are documented as permanent residents or US citizens that were enrolled in the Migrant Education Program K-12 are also eligible for CAMP. Approximately 90% of K-12 migrant students are identified as Latinx and 34% as Emerging Bilinguals (EBs). Therefore, these characteristics must be present among CAMP students as well. However, we cannot argue that migrant students are a monolithic racial, cultural, or ethnic group, but they have been defined as "a unique cultural community" (Jaramillo & Nuñez, 2009, p. 97).

Previous research has documented that migrant students belong in a category with these salient characteristics: low SES and high levels of poverty, lack of content and language support, non-valued cultural and social capital, limited knowledge of the US educational system, limited and/or interrupted K-12 schooling experiences, frequent school mobility, and cultural marginalization (California Department of Education [CADE], 2007; Garza et al., 2004; Gibson & Hidalgo, 2009; Lopez et al., 2001; Zalaquett et al., 2007). We will discuss the barriers that these students have faced and the factors associated with their academic success as identified by previous literature.

Barriers to the education of migrant seasonal farm working students

Considering the context in which they and their families establish their livelihood, migrant students face myriad obstacles since the onset of their educational careers. These barriers often continue throughout their academic life into higher education. It may be argued that migrant students' needs are greater than those of non-migrant students, low-income students, and ethnically diverse students, even those that fall in more than one of these categories (Quezada et al., 2017). In fact, not much is known about the college experiences of migrant students (Mendez & Bauman, 2018) and they may be considered the most underrepresented group of students on college campuses.

A deeper look at the barriers MSFW students face reveals the dismal educational reality of this population. The socio-economic disadvantages of this population combined with the migratory nature of the seasonal farm work, represents outstanding hurdles for the education needs of migrant students (Quezada et al., 2017; Salinas & Franquiz, 2004). In fact, migrant workers have been identified as having the lowest levels of educational attainment of any educational group (Zalaquett et al., 2007). In Kandel's (2008) Profile of Hired Farmworkers Report, it is revealed that only 28% of MSFWs graduate high school, only 20.7% have some college education, and 30% have less than a ninth-grade education. The Association of Farmworker Opportunity Program (2014) found that children of MSFWs have a 50% high school dropout rate. In their study, Garza, Reyes, and Trueba (2004) conclude that MSFW students have the lowest graduation rates compared to any other population attending public school. Other factors including lack of health care, food insecurity, as well as language and cultural barriers all contribute to the accumulation of obstacles to their educational attainment (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996; Willison & Jang, 2009). Migrant students continue to face these barriers during their college experience as well.

From the previous factors, we can argue that many CAMP students arrive in college without having participated in rigorous college preparatory coursework and they do not have knowledge about their options in post-secondary education. They will also be taught by professors who may not possess the cultural competence to understand the unique needs of this population.

Factors associated with college success

Due to the lack of previous research on MSFW students in higher education and because of the similar issues that first-generation Latinx students face in higher education, we have compiled the characteristics and nature of the factors that contribute to the college success of Latinx students.

Demographic characteristics: Latinas earn more than 60% of all associate and bachelor's degrees achieved by Latinx students. They also have a higher percentage of college enrollment and are significantly less likely to drop out of college (Mendez & Bauman, 2018).

Language is another factor associated with the successful college results. For Latinx students whose first language is English, high-school GPA is a predictor of first-year college success, but not so for Latinx whose first language was Spanish. Therefore, the language barrier seems to persist beyond K-12 education (Zwick & Sklar, 2005).

A majority of Latinx students in higher education attend 2-year public institutions. Twenty-eight percent attend public, four-year institutions. Latinx students are also more likely to be enrolled for six years after initial enrollment and have a significantly lower completion rate, both in two and four-year institutions, compared to White and Asian students at 47% and 63% (Excelencia in Education, 2019).

Latinx students have the second lowest persistence and retention rate. In a report by the NSC Research Center (2020), of all Latinx students enrolled for the first time in 2017, only 59.5% returned to their IHE as compared to 72.7% of Asian students. The authors of this study defined retention as continued enrollment or degree completion within the same higher education institution in the fall terms of a student's first and second year. Persistence was defined as continued enrollment at any higher education institution, including one different from the institution of initial enrollment, in the fall terms of a student's first and second year (NSC Research Center, 2020).

Family support and social networks: Other factors that have been identified by previous literature is the role of the family in terms of the success of Latinx students. Those students whose families are supportive and serve as a source of motivation are more likely to succeed in higher education (Lopez, 2001). In 2004, Treviño documented that families of migrant students that are engaged in their children's education programs ultimately encouraged academic achievement, minimized school interruptions, made extensive use of learning resources in the community, and advocated for their children in school. All these actions are positively correlated with school academic engagement and outcomes. Additionally, such family practices build a sense of connection to school, which leads to positive academic results.

Institutional factors: The role of institutions in terms of the engagement and outcomes of migrant students still need to be properly addressed. There are studies that focus on the individual characteristics of the students, including their emotional attachment to their institutions or the sense of belonging and validation (Nora et al., 2011; Oseguera et al., 2009), but the

specific institutional practices that enhance that sense of connection among all students in general and among migrant students in particular has not been fully determined yet. Quezada, et al. (2017) highlight the need for K-12 school districts to adopt a culturally proficient approach in benefit of the academic success of migrant student. In this regard, there is a need to understand, how institutions of higher education facilitate the representation of students' identities on campus life and what mechanisms are in place to ensure students have access to information and resources in non-stigmatizing, but effective ways.

Conceptual framework

As previous research has made clear, there are specific factors that may signal the likelihood of success of students in higher education. Socio-economic status, race/ethnicity, gender, and language, mainly. There are also institutional characteristics that may contribute to said success, such as the size of the institution, and its geographical location, and the desire or motivation to serve students as expressed in their mission statements (Lau, 2003). Because we will be comparing the success, as measured by retention and graduation rates, of CAMP students, we need to include in the analysis the characteristics of similar institutions. Therefore, we decided to analyze data only from community colleges. These institutions are similar in the total number of students, the characteristics of the students served, and their missions.

Methods
Context and Participants

The participants in the present study are located in a community college, "Acre Community College" that hosts a CAMP, known as BUENO CAMP, in a state in the Southwest of the United States. We will compare the results of the students participating in BUENO CAMP to the results obtained by the rest of the students in the Community College. Then we will compare the overall results of the CAMP students to the rest of the students in community colleges in the same state.

Acre Community College is a small community college that serves approximately 9,000 students, approximately 60% of which are identified as White or unknown and 40% as "underrepresented minority." It is situated in a rural area within the state, and it is mainly attended by students that live in the surrounding area. Although in its mission, the institution generally acknowledges the goal of providing knowledge and skills to advance the quality of life and success of the diverse community they serve, they also adopted a more specific diversity statement in which they claim the institution must nurture and respect differences. It should be noted that there is no specific mention of any minoritized group.

Data and Data Sources

The data used in the present study was collected from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center and from the State Department Higher Education's website. We collected aggregated data as reported by community colleges for completion rates. We also compared the completion rates according to following characteristics:

- Race/ethnicity
- Gender
- Nationality/Country of origin
- Bilingualism/Biliteracy

For CAMP students, these are the descriptive statistics for the variables used:

Table 1: Descriptive statistics *(n=360 observations)*

Variable (logs)	Mean	SD
Female	234	70.51
Male	126	57.94
Latinx	352	97.78
White	7	0.02
African America	1	<0.01
United States	160	44.44
Mexico	197	54.72
other	3	0.83
Bilingual	336	67.26
Monolingual	23	56.52

Procedure

For the quantitative data, an independent samples *t-test* was used to determine if the completion means between the students in BUENO CAMP v. students in community college were equal.

The *t-test* is one of the most reliable statistical procedures to determine if the variance of the means between groups is statistically significant (Agresti, 2007). The independent *t-test* is an inferential test designed to compare the means of a given variable between two groups. The *t-test* helps to determine whether the difference between the means of the two groups is due to the effect of the sample, random factors, or to an underlying true difference between the populations. A 5% level of significance was used to determine statistical significance and the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used to run the analyses.

The data used meets all the assumptions required in order for the *t-test* to be considered valid and reliable:

    a. Continuous dependent variable
    b. Binomial/categorical independent variable
    c. The observations are independent for each group

    d. There are no significant outliers
    e. The data are approximately normally distributed— we performed a Shapiro-Wilk test of normality and all variables are close to a normal distribution.
    f. Variances are homogeneous— we performed a Levene's test for homogeneity of variances.

Next, we will present the findings of our statistical analysis.

Results

For the research question "is there a statistically significant difference on CAMP student graduation rates compared to all Acre Community College students," a *t-test* was computed to investigate whether the CAMP student graduation rate is significantly different from all Acre Community College students. Assumptions were checked and one was violated: the groups are different in size. Thus, the results should be interpreted with caution. The experiment group are the CAMP students (N = 360), and the control group for this test are Acre students (N = 2595), which represents students entering the college from the years 2006 to 2012 and ending in the years 2009 to 2015. The graduates represented in the control group are based on three-year graduation rates.

Table 2 shows that students who were in CAMP graduated at a significantly higher rate from those who were Acre Community College Students, t(2953) = -15.21, p<.001. Inspection of the two group means indicates that the average graduation rate for CAMP students (M = 66.11) is significantly higher than the score (M = 27.59) for those Acre Community College Students. The effect size d is .82, which is a large effect size, which indicates there is a strong magnitude of difference between the two variables.

Table 2

Comparison of CAMP student graduation rates and Acre Community College student graduations rates (n = 360 CAMP students and 2595 = Acre Community College students)

Variable	M	SD	t	df	p
Graduation Rates					
CAMP	66.11	0.47	-15.21	2953	<.001
Acre Student	27.59	0.45			

Table 2 shows that students who were in CAMP graduated at a significantly higher rate from those who were Acre Community College Students, t(49733) = 19.761, p<.001. Inspection of the two group means indicates that the average graduation rate for CAMP students (M = 66.11) is significantly higher than the score (M = 22.44) for the Community College Students in the state. The effect size d is .99, which is a very large effect size, which indicates there is a strong magnitude of difference between the two variables.

For the research question, is there a statistically significant difference on CAMP student graduation rates compared to all State Community College students, a second Independent *t test* was computed to investigate whether the CAMP student graduation rate is significantly different from all Community College, two-year public institution students in the state. The size assumption was violated in this case as well. The experiment group are the CAMP students (n = 360), and the control group for this test are Colorado community college students (N = 49,376), which represents students entering the college from the years 2006 to 2012 and ending in the years 2009 to 2015. The graduates represented in the control group are based on three-year graduation rates.

Table 3

Comparison of CAMP student graduation rates and Colorado Community College student graduations rates (n = 360 CAMP students and 49,736 = Colorado Community College students)

Variable	M	SD	t	df	p
Graduation Rates					
CAMP	66.11	0.47	-19.761	49733	<.001
Co C.C. Student	22.44	0.42			

For our third research question, we attempt to determine the characteristics of a successful CAMP student. Therefore, we decided to check if there is a statistically significant difference on CAMP student graduation rates based on whether they were monolingual, English speakers or bilingual speakers?

A *t test* was computed to investigate whether the CAMP student graduation rate is significantly different when comparing those who are monolingual English speakers (N = 23) and those who are bilingual (N = 336). Assumptions were checked and one was violated: the groups are different in size. Thus, the results should be interpreted with caution.

Table 4 shows that bilingual CAMP students graduated at a higher rate but not a significantly higher rate from those who were monolingual CAMP students, t(360) = -.910, p=.363. Inspection of the two group means indicates that the average graduation rate for bilingual CAMP students (M = 67.26) is significantly higher than the score (M = 56.52) for those monolingual CAMP students.

Table 4

Comparison of bilingual CAMP student graduation rates and monolingual, English speaking CAMP student graduation rates (n = 336 bilingual CAMP students and 23 = monolingual, English speaking CAMP students)

Variable	M	SD	t	df	p
Graduation Rates					
Bilingual	67.26	0.51	-.910	358	.363
Monolingual (English)	56.52	0.48			

Given the fact that an overwhelming majority of our students identify as Latinx, we also checked if there is a statistically significant difference on CAMP student graduation rates based on ethnicity. A *t-test* was computed to investigate whether the CAMP student graduation rate is significantly different when comparing the ethnicity of the participants. Because only one of the 360 students [in this study] does not identify as Latinx or White, this evaluation will only include the Latinx CAMP students (N = 352) and White CAMP students (N = 7). Assumptions were checked and one was violated: the groups are different in size. Thus, the results should be interpreted with caution. Further investigation would be necessary to make a claim of significance given the violation of this assumption.

Table 5 shows that Latinx CAMP students graduated at a higher rate from those who were White CAMP students but not significantly, t(359) = -1.251, p=.212. Inspection of the two group means indicates that the average graduation rate for Latinx CAMP students (M = 65.63) is not significantly higher than the score (M = 42.86) for those White CAMP students.

Table 5
Comparison of Latinx CAMP student graduation rates and White CAMP student graduation student graduations rates (n = 352 Latinx and 7 = White students)

Variable	M	SD	t	df	p
Graduation Rates					
Latinx	65.63	0.54	-1.251	357	.212
White	42.86	0.48			

It is also important to understand if gender had any major effect the students' graduation rates. To answer this a *t test* was computed to investigate whether the CAMP student graduation rate is significantly different when comparing female CAMP students (N = 234) and male CAMP students (N = 126). Assumptions were checked and none were violated.

Table 6 shows that female CAMP students graduated at a significantly higher rate from male CAMP students, t(360) = -2.417, p=.016. Inspection of the two group means indicates that the average graduation rate for female CAMP students (M = 70.51) is significantly higher than the score (M = 57.94) for those male CAMP students. The effect size d is .28, which is a small to medium effect size, which indicates there is some magnitude of difference between the two variables.

Table 6
Comparison of female CAMP student graduation rates and male CAMP student graduations rates (n = 234 female CAMP students and 126 male CAMP students).

Variable	M	SD	t	df	p
Graduation Rates					
Female	70.51	0.50	-2.417	358	.016
Male	57.94	0.46			

Finally, a *t test* was computed to investigate whether the CAMP student graduation rate is significantly different when comparing those CAMP students who were born in the US (N = 160) and those who born outside of the US (N = 200). All assumptions were met this time.

Table 7 shows that CAMP students who were born outside the US graduated at a higher rate from those US Born CAMP students, t(360) = -.845, p=.399. Inspection of the two group means indicates that the average graduation rate for CAMP students born abroad

(M = 68.00) is not statistically significantly higher than the score (M = 63.75) for those US born CAMP students.

Table 7

Comparison of foreign-born CAMP student graduation rates and U.S. born CAMP student graduation rates (n = 200 foreign-born CAMP students and 160 = U.S. born CAMP students)

Variable	M	SD	t	df	p
Graduation Rates					
Foreign-born	68.00	0.48	-.845	358	.399
U.S. born	63.75	0.47			

Discussion

Taking into account the limitations of the data and the statistical test performed, the results point in an optimistic direction with regard to the success of CAMP programs. This success is even more important as CAMP programs serve students categorized as marginalized and at high risk of attrition. These are students whom research has found highly likely to leave college in their first year of attendance. For instance, previous research has found that college students who identify as Latinx, first-generation, and from low socio-economic background students are much less likely to graduate than their White peers (Becerra, 2010). However, the results in this study indicate that Latinx, first-generation, low-income, CAMP students actually have completion rates above those of White students in similar community colleges. Although there is a need for more refined data, this is an initial remarkable outcome of this study to reveal that CAMP students are the exception to many rules and norms commonly known of higher education students.

Due to the limitations in the results of the study, we cannot assert that CAMP students are, in general, more likely to graduate. However, our results indicate that female, CAMP students have higher graduation rates at 71% versus 58% male graduation rates. Graduation rates for CAMP students born outside of the United States are 68% versus 63%. CAMP bilingual students graduate at 67% versus 57% of their monolingual peers. Finally, CAMP students who identify as Latinx graduate at a rate of 66% versus 43% to their non-Latinx peers. Therefore, as a preliminary finding, it can be argued that the profile of a successful CAMP student is a Latinx, bilingual, female, student who was born-abroad. Some of these characteristics are not statistically significant and we need more data to corroborate these initial findings, but the higher rate of success is noteworthy.

Regardless of the lack of statistical significance in the disparity in graduation rates among these students, we can argue that the strategies and services provided in CAMP programs are effective for all students and that they contribute to the positive outcomes in higher education of student populations that have been traditionally regarded as the most underrepresented community in higher education (García, 2011). According to these figures, CAMP students are defying the odds with their success in higher education.

Another important note to consider is that when reviewing this sample of CAMP students, 150 of these students are still enrolled in college at the time this data was collected. Of these 150 students enrolled, 82 of whom were categorized as non-graduates, so simply stating the graduation rate of the CAMP program is 66%, does not tell the entire story. Of the 33% or 123 students who have not graduated, 67% or 82 of them are still enrolled and could be graduates at some point in time in the future. In other words, it cannot be assumed with a 66% graduation rate, that the other 33% have dropped out. In fact, only 11% of the total participants in this study could be considered drop outs, and 89% have either graduated, or are still enrolled.

Implications

We would like to conclude by pointing out some potential implications of the results of the present study. Knowing BUENO CAMP's success rate is significantly higher than community college students in the Southwest, it could be a worthwhile effort to scale the program's services to assist with retention practices in all higher education institutions. This is especially true for colleges and universities whose priority is to improve the success of their diverse populations. Institutions serving traditionally marginalized and minoritized populations should adopt some of the practices implemented in BUENO CAMP. This leaves practitioners with a couple of looming questions to consider. How do we scale a program like BUENO CAMP to serve a broader portion of the college-going population? If this is unreasonable, what are the key components of BUENO CAMP that attribute to the positive outcomes they produce? A qualitative look at the program's services is now necessary, investigating the most poignant and effective practices of BUENO CAMP that lead to their students' success. Further research is necessary to document the practices being implemented in BUENO CAMP. A greater analysis of the students' perception of their experience in the program may prove to be beneficial to identify the specific services BUENO CAMP provides that lead to their success. This next level of inquiry is necessary considering the level of success BUENO CAMP students achieve.

In addition to the charge for further study, more can be said about the importance of a program like BUENO CAMP regarding its implications for historically marginalized populations currently in higher education or wishing to pursue post-secondary education. The success of BUENO CAMP further strengthens the necessity to support funding for programs that target underserved populations in college. CAMP programs across the country need to a higher level of financial support as they only serve a limited number of students. The need for the services programs like BUENO CAMP provides is paramount considering the fact that the participants in BUENO CAMP represent populations that face a nexus of college-going barriers. These populations include first-generation college students, language minority students, ethnic minority students, low-income, mobile, migrant students. In the face of the barriers that these populations are presented with, BUENO CAMP students are realizing success in the form of college completion. The mandate should now be to turn this phenomenon into a norm, rather than the exception to the rule.

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Virtual Professional Learning Community:
Supporting Migrant Educators

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Abstract

Migrant educators across the United States support children of highly mobile agricultural workers. Since families move often, many children have missed school and some have not yet learned essential skills needed for school success. Therefore, this paper describes a virtual professional learning community designed to help migrant educators across New York State identify and address students' needs in the areas of reading and math skills.

Keywords: *Teaching and Learning; Education Support*

Introduction

Anna is a former classroom teacher and is now an educator for one of the Migrant Education Program Regional Centers in New York. Once a week, Anna meets with Anthony, an eight-year-old boy enrolled in a rural public school. Anthony and his family moved to New York last year from Texas. His family speaks Spanish at home, and Anthony and his four siblings are learning English. Anthony has attended three schools since his parents started working as agricultural workers.

Anna visits with Anthony at his home. She balances instruction between Anthony's immediate needs and his long-term needs. For instance, Anna helps him with his homework. Sometimes, he has trouble understanding it, but she tries not to provide the answers and guides him while he figures it out. Anthony wants to do well in school, but his schooling has not been consistent, and he has some gaps in basic reading and math skills. She must therefore address these long-term needs to help him achieve grade-level expectations. Anna is eager to help him with the specific skills he requires to succeed in school, but she struggles to find effective ways to identify and remediate these gaps. Anna discusses these challenges with her colleagues and

learns instructional approaches during monthly meetings at the Migrant Education Regional Center. Still, in her day-to-day work, she works alone teaching students who qualify for her support.

This article examines one state's approach to addressing the professional development needs of their migrant educators who provide supplemental educational services to the children of highly mobile agricultural workers. This two-year virtual program is designed to supplement professional training for migrant educators.

The Challenge

The success of any program is contingent upon the effectiveness of that program. Migrant Education Programs (MEPs) across the country support students who are the children of highly mobile agricultural workers. Many families live in poverty and move frequently. Most live in isolation and speak little to no English, while others are learning English. The children have missed school because of the nature of their parents' work, and as a result, some have not acquired the essential skills needed for school success. As a

result, they fall behind academically, are retained, and "although currently there is no reliable estimate of the graduation rate for migrant students, the working estimate is roughly 45-50%" (Ed.Gov, 2015). Therefore, professional development for migrant educators is needed to ensure their teaching effectiveness – this critical aspect is the cornerstone to the success of Migrant Education Programs.

In 2016, New York State required that migrant educators administer the easyCBM to assess their students' skill development in mathematics and reading (Alonzo, Tindal, Ulmer, & Glasgow, 2006). These quick and easily administered measures assess students' basic skill development. Educators assessed their students twice a year to determine the effectiveness of the MEP services.

Faced with limited funding and time, the New York State Migrant Education Program Identification & Recruitment – Technical Assistance & Support Center (NYS-MEP ID&R – TASC) or TASC, was determined to find effective ways to support regional directors and migrant educators at each of the eight regional instructional and support service centers across the state of New York. TASC took advantage of technology to develop a sustainable professional development program for educators across the state.

TASC had a two-step vision to move forward. One step was to support migrant educators beyond simply administering and interpreting the assessment results. Since educators collected data from the easyCBM assessments, TASC used this opportunity to teach educators to use this data to inform instruction for individual students. The second step was to leverage technology to build sustainable and consistent access to professional development and instructional resources. TASC identified reading and math experts who could translate the easyCBM data into learning needs based on

New York State Learning Standards (2017). These same experts were interested in taking their instruction into a variety of virtual settings.

Establishing a Professional Development Community - Virtually

To support and strengthen migrant educators' skills in administering and then using the easyCBM results to teach specific reading and math skills, TASC planned a mixture of virtual and in-person sessions throughout the year. TASC selected the Zoom virtual platform because it ensured that migrant educators could interact with one another (Zoom Video Communications, 2019).

TASC transitioned statewide professional development from in-person training into a virtual community incorporating virtual training, webinars, online resources, and professional development modules. The eight regional centers continued with face-to-face meetings utilizing various online resources. At first, most educators preferred face-to-face meetings; this opinion, however, changed over time.

Statewide virtual training. TASC debuted its first statewide virtual training at the beginning of the program year. All regional directors and migrant educators met at each of the eight regional centers to learn how to administer and record the easyCBM math and reading measures. In this way, everyone received the same instructions. The presenters were projected on a Zoom virtual platform screen (Zoom Video Communications, 2019). While the presenters were virtual, the regional directors and educators were together and interacted during the presentation.

Leveraging technology. Next, before the statewide in-person conference, the reading and math content experts prepared pre-conference instructional materials. Each regional director facilitated pre-

conference workshops during their scheduled meetings. During these meetings, migrant educators watched videos, viewed/listened to voice-over PowerPoints, and read articles about math and reading skills. For instance, in reading, one article, Target the Problem, explained the components of early reading skills such as phonemic awareness and phonics (Reading Rockets, n.d.). Then educators viewed a video and practiced a phonics assessment. In math skills, regional directors received a PowerPoint with directions to access easyCBM's Math Item Analysis report. Then the migrant educators identified areas to focus on with their students – these results were then used during the workshop at the statewide conference.

In-person conference. During a 2-day in-person statewide conference and introduction before launching into an online platform, migrant educators attended various workshops. All educators administering the easyCBM were required to attend both the reading and math workshops.

During the workshops, migrant educators learned to interpret student data to determine individual students' needs and administer additional diagnostic assessments to pinpoint specific needs in reading and math. For example, if a student had difficulty reading fluently, migrant educators practiced administering and interpreting a phonics screener to identify a student's difficulties in specific phonics skills. For example, a student had not yet acquired the phonics skill for silent-e words in one video. Therefore, educators administered the phonics screener to pinpoint the skill need. In addition to data analysis, the workshops included various centers to practice hands-on activities designed to address specific reading and math needs. In both sessions, handouts were provided.

At the end of the conference, migrant educators completed a survey and requested additional training.

These post-workshop survey responses helped TASC determine the next steps. For instance, educators requested training in the following areas:
(1) Addressing the specific needs of students new to this country with limited English-speaking skills,
(2) Using the phonics screener,
(3) Utilizing the easyCBM to inform instruction of older students, and
(4) Strategies applicable for high school students.

Webinars. Following the conference, TASC scheduled a series of webinars associated with specific requests from migrant educators. Educators registered for a webinar from a list of options. TASC offered sessions at different times during the week and group webinars scheduled during a regional center's monthly meetings. An expert led each 90-minute webinar in reading and math. The webinars consisted of PowerPoints, assessment tools, instructional approaches, practice with feedback, and opportunities for questions and discussion. For instance, during the phonics workshop, educators observed the trainer model how to interpret a student's test results and select resources to support the student's learning of a needed skill. Then educators practiced – they interpreted a student's results and took turns selecting resources from the online resource library (see below). The trainer provided feedback, led a discussion while educators asked questions and shared experiences. In math, during a fractions workshop, the trainer used a document reader attached to her computer to demonstrate using Cuisenaire Rods to model the addition and subtraction of fractions with like and unlike denominators. Again, educators had time to practice, ask questions, and receive feedback from their statewide colleagues and trainers.

Resource libraries. TASC established a resource library on the New York State Migrant

Education Program website. For instance, in addressing reading and math skills, the library includes instructional tools that coincide with specific skills and directions on building a student profile to guide instructional decisions.

Professional development modules. Another section on the website involves professional development modules. Regional directors can use these stand-alone training modules to facilitate a group session or by migrant educators for independent study. For instance, the website includes nine modules: teaching the main idea, theme, or vocabulary development. In addition, the mathematics module includes instructional videos that demonstrate strategies such as hands-on teaching of fractions, decimals, and pre-algebra skills.

Each module includes a facilitator's guide, a video, and instructional resources—the trainer in the video models a strategy to support skill development. Educators then have opportunities to practice the skill. In addition, each module includes modifications for students learning English. For example, some modules include an article for study groups, and an additional module provides various ways to lead a compelling article study. After field-testing the content during the initial webinars, content trainers used the educators' questions, and the pacing was incorporated into the video module.

Ongoing support. The reading and math trainers provided ongoing support to migrant educators, regional directors, and TASC. TASC met with trainers via virtual meetings utilizing the Zoom virtual platform (Zoom Video Communication, 2019). Regional directors invited trainers to monthly meetings for additional training in utilizing resources; other times, trainers attended regional meetings virtually. Finally, migrant educators emailed trainers with questions.

Project Strengths and Lessons Learned
Strengths of Project

There are many overall benefits. The most significant benefits include the resources, the connections the migrant educators made with one another, and the initiative's cost. Each of these benefits is discussed below.

Resources. The initial project goal was to teach educators how to administer and report the easyCBM data and support educators in interpreting these results to inform instruction based on individual student's needs. The project was accomplished by providing professional development beyond the initial workshops in assessment administration and by establishing an ongoing, consistent approach to professional learning across the state. As reported, one-shot professional development does not have lasting effects on practice (Joyce & Showers, 2002).

The pre-conference and conference were followed by webinars, resource libraries, additional webinars, and more professional development resources. Resource libraries and professional development modules align with the training provided during the webinars. These resources also support new migrant educators and help guide regional directors. Directors can readily access the materials to use during in-service meetings. In addition, both the resource libraries and professional development modules ensure the sustainability of the initiative.

The resources targeted the specific needs of the educators. The discussions during the virtual webinars helped TASC connect with migrant educators and learn the specific challenges in the field. Following the webinars, TASC debriefed with content trainers, and based on these discussions, TASC planned for additional training and resources to support the educators working in the field.

Community building. During the project, there was an effort to build community among migrant educators who work across the state. Since an essential aspect of each webinar included questions and discussion, educators had opportunities to discuss ideas with other educators. At first, some educators were hesitant, but over time, more and more educators participated. It was beneficial when an experienced migrant educator asked questions or expressed uncertainty in dealing with an instructional dilemma. Other educators became willing to ask questions about practices they did not yet understand. For instance, during one webinar, a migrant educator explained an instructional practice in a classroom that, in her opinion, was not effective. She expressed uncertainty about how she should support her student. With the trainer and other migrant educators, she learned ways to modify practice and various solutions to try with her student. Without this level of support, she would have likely continued an ineffective practice.

Furthermore, since the content trainers remained the same throughout the project, the messages were consistent, and the educators became comfortable with the trainers. Migrant educators also connected with TASC since the state team participated in the webinars as well. They ensured that everyone could access the webinars and facilitated the presentation, but more importantly, they participated. As a result, TASC asked questions, completed activities, and offered suggestions as part of this learning community.

Cost. This initiative is one way to offset limited funding – bringing educators together virtually and providing online resources are cost-efficient. This virtual project, which focuses on specific skill development for many people across many miles, saves money.

Lessons Learned

There were also many lessons learned throughout this project. While technology offers effective and cost-efficient solutions to support professional learning, it also presents challenges and ways to overcome these challenges.

TASC launched the first statewide training with little practice. However, they quickly found out about the potential challenges of technology, such as the need for technology checks ahead of time and incorporating additional conference cameras, speakers, and microphones. They also attended other webinars to learn "how" to handle registration and attendance, facilitate the sessions, address audio challenges, and deal with material handouts. Each webinar taught TASC ways to address new challenges. Since migrant educators displayed varied technological abilities, and many educators had not participated in a webinar format, TASC provided step-by-step guidance from signing in and accessing the webinar and support with audio. TASC learned that one person was needed to take individual calls as educators experienced connection issues before and during webinars. TASC learned how to ensure that everyone knew how to operate webinars, including the chat feature, mute the audio, or message someone, privately.

At the regional offices, meetings to train regional directors were critical in moving forward. Some directors needed support in setting up the video and audio-conferencing equipment and learning various fix-it strategies in addressing computer, audio, and camera issues, mainly if the equipment was not strong enough at their center. For example, when virtual training was held in large rooms, there were audio issues because the microphone and speakers on the laptops were not sufficient and required augmentation. However, the directors became more comfortable over time.

Also, for both the webinars and extensive group training, the content trainers struggled with reading the group and catching non-verbal cues. For instance, trainers had difficulty engaging the educators in group discussions because it was hard to gauge an individual's willingness to participate. During webinars, TASC encouraged the use of the "chat box" for questions and comments, and they also made time during the sessions to discuss key ideas. In the beginning, TASC initiated many of the questions or included ideas to break the ice, such as polls and breakout rooms, allowing educators to meet in small groups. In time, the educators willingly participated. However, some educators had a level of self-consciousness; for instance, some expressed discomfort looking at themselves. In addition, participation dropped when TASC started recording webinars – TASC stopped the recordings.

Another current challenge is ensuring that educators continue to access and utilize the materials on the website. Some educators were not accessing the resource materials provided on the website. Instructional change is not easily attained. Therefore, it is essential to provide educators with opportunities to locate relevant materials to integrate the changes into their existing routines. TASC is now offering ongoing training such as short website tours and encouraging website use by "advertising" resources in the Migrant Educator Bimonthly Newsletter.

Website maintenance and updating are vital to the success of this initiative. Dated materials, inaccessible links, and difficulty locating resources can lead to frustration, and thus, educators will not turn to the website as a resource. Fortunately, TASC has someone devoted to maintaining the website as a resource for educators.

Over the next two years, TASC and regional directors will support educators in using the materials and evaluate their effectiveness before adding them to the library. Migrant educators received ProBooks during the second year of the project, which can be utilized for virtual staff meetings, attending workshops, accessing resources from the website, and working with students.

Conclusion

Overall, TASC learned many lessons. Technology requires patience. It is essential to take the time to learn and practice features on the platform. It is also critical to learn from others, such as attending other webinars.

Community building that is planned and intentional, particularly with educators who work alone in the field, is essential. At times, educators feel isolated, but they have many shared experiences – both successful and challenging. Gathering a community of educators involved in the same work through virtual professional learning allows them to learn from one another. Therefore, the practice of stopping a PowerPoint training to encourage questions, offer support, and share ideas are essential. During each webinar, TASC changed the screen to include everyone, and everyone unmuted the audio. As a result, instead of one voice (the trainer) leading the presentation, all educators could see one another and have a group discussion from hundreds of miles apart. One significant community-building opportunity involved taking advantage of serendipitous moments, such as acknowledging an educator's cat or dog that puts in an appearance during an evening workshop; suddenly, many educators introduce their dog or cat during the webinar.

Overall, the NYS-MEP virtual professional development initiative was a great success. It provided more than the training in specific reading and math skills. Migrant educators and regional directors, united by a common mission, were brought together to learn

with each other and from one another. TASC overcame the obstacles of limited funding and distance between regional centers by offering this valuable virtual platform. In the end, New York State migrant educators are better equipped to address the particular and unique needs of children of highly mobile agricultural workers.

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A Different Day

Miriam L. Bocchetti

Abstract

Violet is a young woman navigating a complex and confusing world. Her family works together in the fields and early one morning Violet finds herself in a complicated situation as she encounters a young man she only knows peripherally. As she strikes up a dialogue with her new friend, she discovers growing up isn't as easy she once thought it was.

Keywords: *Creative Writing; Fiction*

Introduction

"Thoughts are slow and deep and golden in the morning." -John Steinbeck

The engine of the truck rumbled as it came to a stop at a light and slowly began moving again. Violet pushed her hair away from her face and looked out the fogged glass. *It's like that movie she saw once, when visiting relatives in California. Something about a groundhog. Every day was the same. She couldn't remember how that movie ended. Did he ever have a different day? Would she?* Violet sighed, prompting her mom, who was in the seat in front of her, to turn around and say softly, "Se que es temprano." It wasn't even that early, despite it being dark and somewhat chilly for a June summer day.

The truck was getting warm as the temperature increased outside. They were almost to the fields. Typically, Violet and her family started the season north of their house and worked their way back south, so at the end of the season, they were at one of the fields closer to where they lived. When they lived in Albuquerque, they started inward and worked their way to the outskirts. None of this made sense to Violet. She figured if she really wanted to ask, she could. She just never did.

She looked over at her brother next to her. He liked being called Eddie, even though his name was Eduardo. He said it was just easier. Violet wasn't sure who it was easier for. He never elaborated; she never asked. One year older than her, her brother didn't seem to mind the early mornings. He was sleeping, with his earphones in. Not the fancy kind some kids had, but a much less expensive brand their parents tried to convince them last Christmas, was "pretty much the same." *They weren't,* thought Violet.

One of the kids at school made sure to tell them that, on the bus to school several months earlier. "Hey, those are the cheap kind," called one of the white kids who rode the bus with them to school. Eduardo didn't look up. *Why did anyone care,* Violet thought, *headphones are headphones.* And it's not like anyone at their small school had much anyway. Plenty of white people even worked in the fields here, which was not the case in other places they had lived. When Violet's father decided they were going to move to the small town of La Luz, Violet had immediately wondered, "*What kind of place was named "the light?"* Violet had just finished middle school. That was an entire year ago, and she didn't feel any

different about La Luz than when her dad first told them they were going to live closer to both her Tias, her dad's younger sisters. "You can see your cousins every day, if you want!" Instead of the twice yearly visits they endured before moving. The cousin closer to her in age, Catalina, now wanted to be called Cat.

"Like the animal?" Violet asked her.

"Yeah, like the animal," Cat said, rolling her eyes.

I guess she thought the name was easier, too. She was six months older than Violet and didn't let her forget it. Violet's mom warned her about copying Cat's eye rolling habit she seemed to have just developed, according to her Tia Ana. Eddie shifted in his seat. He could sleep anywhere, anytime. Last spring, he had slept almost the entire way to La Luz from Albuquerque, even though it was already light out when they left their two-bedroom rental and climbed into the pickup they used for everything. All of their belongings were crammed in the bed of the truck. No real furniture, though. Violet's Tias all had odds and ends that they were going to bring over, including a small couch, a kitchen table and a small dresser for Violet. The rest they could pick up from the nearby Walmart.

In the truck on this morning, Violet played word games on her phone, wanting to text her two best friends she was not too happy about leaving behind in Albuquerque. Not that she was given a choice. She was, after all, only fourteen. *At what age, do you start getting a choice?* She knew it was pointless to ask. She swiped at her phone. *I would text Yesy or Martha but not this early in the morning.*

Starting early was the only way to pick cherries. Either you picked early and finished early, or you didn't bother working the season at all. Everyone, it would seem, became a morning person during cherry season. You had no choice.She would wait for her first break, which she never really took anyway. She would spend a few minutes texting, look around for where her parents or Eduardo might be and then go back to work. Her mom checked on her at least once during their shift, if not more. Violet knew why she did it but didn't think it was necessary. No one bothered her; no one even talked to her. She worked quietly and quickly, only looking up when someone called her name, and it was usually a relative of some kind, waving enthusiastically.

Violet didn't hate cherries; she could even still eat them, unlike her mom who exclaimed anytime they saw cherries outside of work, "Tenido suficiente de esos, gracias!" But she did hate how repetitive her days were. She knew it could be worse. She worked steadily throughout last summer and was able to pocket most of her pay. She knew from some of her friends that this wasn't always the case. One of her classmates, Sam, told her he wished he could keep his wages because he turned most of it over to his parents. Violet knew her parents could use the extra help but would never ask her to do that.

She wondered if Cat would be working today. She worked last summer but spent most of her work time "crushing" on David the son of her Tia Ana's best friend, Sandra, who lived nearby. He was 16, drove his own car and worked completely on his own, without any parental supervision. His mom worked at the local *tienda* in town. When she asked Cat why he didn't just work there, in the refrigerated aisles with the already picked fruits and vegetables, four blocks from

their neighborhood, she said exasperatedly, "Because, *dummy,* he can make more money here than he can there, and you know Al pays him under the table here."

Al, the orchard manager, didn't pay Violet or her family, "under the table", but she knew some of the workers were paid that way. All the workers talked to one another and Violet would overhear her parents discussing it on the way to and from work. She did ask once, what the phrase meant and they told her to basically, hush. "No te preocupes" her mom said, without even turning around. So, Violet didn't push the subject.

David was tall enough; she didn't know when she started noticing taller boys, but she knew she wasn't the only one taking notice. Her friend Yesy, always seemed to know the boys at school's heights, telling her, "Carlos is nearly *six feet tall*, in the hallway after Geometry.

"One of my uncles is six feet tall," Violet told Yesy.

"It's really not that tall." Yesy replied, "Well, it is to me! The tallest male in my family is not even *five eight!*" Yesy was nice enough, but a little easy to impress. But as her abuela said *la gente le gusta lo que les gusta (people like what they like).* And Yesy liked tall boys, like Carlos and David.

Violet sighed; they were pulling into the adjacent lot from the orchard. Eduardo sat up and yawned, pulling out his headphones and rubbing his face. "Looks like it's going to be hot," said Violet's dad. They walked to the bin pick up area where they would clock in. The light was peeking through the mountains. La Luz was a pretty town, at least in the early morning hours. It was just now a little before five o'clock. They would work until around 1pm, which seemed like such a long time from now.

One of the managers pointed to where he wanted them to start. Violet hurried alongside her parents. Her parents had worked in agriculture since they were in elementary school. They didn't even get to middle school. Her mom finished the sixth grade but her dad stopped going to school after fifth grade. They were both hard workers, but Violet wondered, *at what price*?

She hooked her bin on and walked to the area she had been directed to begin picking. She could see Eduardo a little ways away, with his headphones back in. They were told not to wear headphones but some people did anyway. *Who was going to say anything?* The managers rarely walked between the cherries.

Violet considered herself to be a decent picker, not as fast as some but good enough for someone her age and size. She didn't really need a ladder, and anyhow, for some reason Al only had the males use the ladders. Violet's friend Martha would say that was a classic example of sexism. Violet didn't care enough to say anything.

She worked steadily as the sun came up. She filled two bins, tossing them into the trucks as they passed by. When she was smaller, she needed help to toss the contents of the bins. Now, she could handle it all on her own. The next thing she knew, she could feel someone was working close to her. She looked up and saw it was David, her cousin Cat's crush.

"Hi," David said, waving to her from a short distance.

"Oh…hey," Violet stammered, "I didn't see you."

"It's fine; you seemed deep in thought."

"Not really, just kind of tired."

"Yeah me, too. I don't think I'll ever get used to being up this early."

"Oh, have you not been working for very long?"

"Oh, I've been working since I was 7 or 8, probably," David said, "I just can't get used to waking up this early. I couldn't fall asleep until after 10."

Violet's family was really good at getting to bed early in the summer, often climbing into bed when it was still light out.

"You should try to go to bed earlier," Violet suggested, not knowing what else to say to him. This was by far the longest conversation they had ever had.

"Yeah, I should try that," David, nodding in agreement.

"Hey, where is your cousin?" David asked.

"Cat?" Violet asked, then immediately thought, *obviously he meant Cat.*

*"*Yeah, doesn't she work here?"

"She does, she just doesn't work today, I guess," Violet said, realizing she didn't really know Cat's work schedule. She could barely keep up with her own work schedule. She just got into the truck in the mornings and arrived at the orchards, like a robot in the movies Eduardo loved to watch.

"She might come later," Violet said, "but I don't really know.

David just nodded. "You don't…really look that much alike," David remarked.

"Yeah...I guess not really."

Violet was shorter, fair skinned with lighter hair, taking after her dad's side of the family. Cat was taller, with broader shoulders, with dark hair and eyes, resembling her own father. Cat was, as another one of her cousins once referred to her as, *unico en su clase*. Violet blended in, looking like her Tias. Violet's dad remarked just the other day that Violet was

beginning to look just like her Tia Luisa. Violet didn't mind that. But she did envy Cat's deep brown eyes that always seemed to be searching. Maybe she was searching for tall boys, like Yesy.

 "Isn't that your brother?" David motioning over to Eduardo as he began to pick on the same side as them.

"Yeah."

David and Eduardo were the same age but didn't run in the same friend circle. David seemed older than Eduardo, more independent, driving to work on his own.

"That's kinda cool your whole family works together," David said.

"Yeah, I guess so," Violet answered. "Doesn't your mom work at Shop and Save? Why don't you work there?"

Violet already knew why but didn't know what else to say.

"Uh-huh, my mom has worked there for years. I just kind of wanted to do my own thing. She's cool and all, but I would just rather come out here and work, at least in the summers. I work there during the year, after school."

"Guess that makes sense." They fell silent, rhythmically picking and tossing.

David wiped his brow and asked Violet, "What do you like to do for fun? Do you play any sports or instruments?"

Violet did not. She ran track in the spring, enjoying the sound of her breathing and running shoes hitting the track. Unlike Cat, who played both volleyball and basketball.

"Not really, I just moved here," Violet answered, even though they had been in La Luz over a year.

"Ah, well, maybe you'll find something you like."

David was a lot nicer and more mature than most of the boys Violet knew; boys who seemed to just want to crack jokes and talk about sports. Caleb, one of the smartest boys in her grade, was one of the only other boys Violet could even have a conversation with. Cat thought Caleb should be Violet's boyfriend, but Violet wasn't even sure how couples formed at her school. They mostly talked about things they watched; they liked a lot of the same shows and movies on Netflix.

Violet only had access to the streaming service thanks to her friend's Martha's willingness to share her login with her. Martha and her sisters all shared one login but so far it hadn't been an issue. Martha's oldest sister attended the University of New Mexico, had an on-campus job in the tutoring center and was easily able to afford the per month cost.

Caleb didn't have to have a job and as soon as he turned 16, would get his older brother's car to drive around. Caleb's parents were the owners of Shop and Save, one of the only grocery stores in La Luz. Caleb was already talking about what college he wanted to go to, and he wasn't going to be attending one of the instate colleges.

No, his parents had recently signed him up for a college visit to UCLA. Violet had only been to California once, when she was much younger to visit her mother's Tia, who had long since passed. She lived in a town outside Bakersfield. The name escaped her at the moment. Her arms were beginning to hurt. She put them down at her sides and breathed in deeply.

David looked over at her, "Break time?"

"No…not quite yet," Violet answered.

Cat was going to be so envious when she hears how talkative David was being with me! Cat had once told Violet that David was "a man of few words." But he didn't seem to be, at least not this early summer morning. Maybe a little reserved, but not quiet. *What was the difference,* Violet wondered.

David stopped picking and pulled out some gum from his back pocket.

"¿Querés chicle?" he asked with a faint grin.

"Sure," said Violet, taking a piece, mostly to be polite. She would have to spit it out later, or else her mom would surely say she reminded her of *la vaca,* as she always did when Violet or Eduardo chewed gum.

"So, what do you think of 'the Luz'? My mom said you used to live in the city?" "The city" was how most people in their town referred to Albuquerque.

"It's okay, a little small. I like the BBQs." Violet offered.

She enjoyed the small, yellowish house they moved into, on the same street of two of her Tias. The whole neighborhood knew one another. They "grilled out" most weekends and some weekday evenings. Someone would grill *carne asada* while others would bring arroz, frijoles and different salsas. Violet's favorite salsa was the mango habanero salsa one of the neighbors made. She said the secret was in the kind of habaneros she used. It was sweet, with a kick to it after she swallowed, feeling like a little flame in her throat. Violet liked these types of get togethers. Most weekends in Albuquerque they would eat indoors and didn't socialize with many people in the neighborhood.

"Yeah, our little 'hood sure knows how to eat!" David chuckled. "Hey, if you want, maybe we could do something one of these evenings, see a movie, get some food?"

There it was. David was asking to hang out with her! Violet slowly turned and looked at David. He was still picking while he waited for her to answer.

"Oh, uh…well, I," Violet stammered. "I can't really date until I'm at least sixteen," *maybe older*, Violet thought.

"Oh, I kind of assumed you were sixteen. That's cool." David seemed unfazed.

Maybe this was typical for him? Violet had never even so much as held hands with a boy. But she knew other girls were already doing much, much more. One of Violet's cousins, Raquel, had gotten pregnant at sixteen. It was as if someone had died when everyone found out. The adults spoke in hushed voices, and in stilted phrases like, "How could she," and "what will she do." In the end, she did what most girls her age and background did: she had the baby.

Now the baby, Talia, was three and just about the cutest baby Violet had ever seen. She even babysat from time to time. The father disappeared soon afterwards, back to Mexico according to her parents. Violet's parents didn't even have to warn her. Their eyes said it all, *do not let that happen to you.* And Violet had no plans to.

David spoke again, "Well, maybe we could do something as a group, you me, some of the guys I hang out with, Cat." He stopped picking and looked over at her. "Would your parents go for that?"

Violet answered honestly, "I don't know. I've never asked. The only boys I hang out with are my cousins." Violet immediately regretted it. *Why would she say that?*

"I have two sisters, both younger, so I totally get it," David shared. Violet smiled and looked up. Her mom was walking towards her.

"Mija, es hora del almuerzo," her mom said. Violet always wondered, why they called a meal so early in the morning, lunch, when in school they ate lunch at noon. I guess it was more the order of the meals, and not the time of the day. They had already eaten their breakfast, when they got up, moving slowly through the dark house. Her mom had made oatmeal, oatmeal with fruit.

David waved to Violet's mom, "Buenas dias, Doña Laura."

Violet's mom said hello back and helped Violet remove her bin. As they walked down the rows of cherry trees, Violet could see both Eduardo and her father getting ready to join them. They didn't have long, about 20 minutes. Her mother had packed beverages and sandwiches for them. They usually ate, in silence, in the truck and then finished up the rest of the workday. Today, though, her mom had questions for her, wanting to know who David was.

"Remember, he's Tia Ana's best friend Sandra's son? He lives down the street."

Violet's mom clicked her tongue, remembering, "Si, si."

Violet's dad spoke next, "He seems like a hard worker."

Although Violet's dad stopped going to school earlier than Violet's mom, he spoke pretty good English. Eduardo already had his headphones in and was watching a sports game on his phone. Violet nodded, even though she knew he couldn't see her.

Violet cleared her throat nervously, "Uh, he actually…he asked if I wanted to get food or watch a movie sometime." She spoke quickly, not bothering to say it in Spanish for her mom's sake. Violet's dad did it for her and her mom turned to look at her. She didn't say anything, just looked at her. *Oh, great, she's already picturing me with a Talia of my own,* Violet thought.

When Violet's mom spoke, it came out slowly, "Si, es solo una pelicula….?" Violet nodded.

Violet's dad spoke again, "We do know him and if it's just there and back, I don't see a problem. Unless, you don't want to go?"

He looked at Violet in the rearview mirror. She blushed.

"I mean, I guess I could go. I do like movies," she said, thinking of how often she and Caleb talked about movies at school. Violet straightened up.

"Anyway, he mentioned it being more of a group activity than a…" She trailed off.

"A date?" Eduardo spoke up, despite his headphones being in. "Are you and David going on a date?"

"No, I said, it *wasn't* a date. Mind your own business, "Violet said, pushing his arm like she used to do on long road trips, when he crossed over to "her side."

Violet thought of all the much bigger families she knew. She didn't know how road trips worked with so many kids. Eduardo snickered and went back to his phone. "Well, time's up, let's go," Violet's dad said. Violet's mom smiled and put her hand out for Violet's trash. They threw their trash into a bag which they would toss into the nearby garbage can. They crossed the dusty lot that served as parking for most of the workers. Many workers carpooled or came from surrounding communities via a bus.

As they resumed work, Violet felt…different. Giddy, even. Sort of like when she woke up on her birthday and knew her mom had made her favorite *tres leches* cake. Violet put her bin back on and started picking. A few minutes went by and she heard her name being called. She looked up, surprised to see her cousin Cat standing there. She had her bin on; it was already half filled.

"Hi!" Cat exclaimed as she waved Violet over. David was standing on the other side of her.

"How was lunch?" Violet quickly said it was fine.

She got in line alongside David and Cat.

They were quiet for a minute and then Cat asked, "So, what movie do you want to see?" Violet froze.

David glanced over at Violet and answered, "Oh, you know, whatever."

"Maybe something funny? I could use a funny movie," said Cat. "Hey, Violet, do you want to come to the movies tomorrow night? David and I are gonna go later tonight."

Violet thought, *well, I guess my parents can relax.* There would be no date. She wasn't sure if there had ever been one.

She turned to Cat and shrugged. "I don't know, I told Raquel I would babysit Talia," Violet lied.

Cat squealed, "Oh, she is so cute! Well, maybe another time."

"Yeah, maybe another time," said Violet. She concentrated on what she was doing, and the rest of the morning passed uneventfully, with Cat keeping up a steady stream of chit chat. Violet had to hand it to her; she *was* easy to be around. She could talk to anyone, about anything.

Once it got close to one in the afternoon, Violet finished the section she was on and announced, "Well, time for me to quit. I'll see you around," pulling up on her bin.

Cat glanced over, "Okay, I just started this bin, so I will see you later. I drove in with Cesar." Cesar was Cat's older brother.

"Wait up, I'm all done," David, hurrying over to Violet and said to Cat, "Text me and we can decide on that movie."

He turned and asked Violet, "Listas?" She nodded and they started walking.

"Hey, I, um, didn't mean to make that weird."

"What?" Violet asked.

"You know, I asked you if you wanted to see a movie and then you said you couldn't and then Cat showed up and we started talking about movies and she said she really wanted to go see one so... I guess I kind of invited her." His words were jumbled, tripping on one another on their way out. Violet shrugged. Was he apologizing or just explaining?

"Oh, it's fine. I asked my parents during lunch and they said maybe next year," Violet said apologetically.

"Oh. Well then, there you go." David smiled. Did she detect disappointment? They reached the clock out area and took turns clocking out. A line was forming behind them. Violet stood off to the side while she waited for her family to finish

clocking out. David waved goodbye and started towards his truck. Violet watched him walk away, looking at his phone. She sighed.

The day had started off exactly the same as any other morning. Violet thought to herself, *but today was a different day.* She laughed to herself. She felt bad about lying to David. Her parents had already said it was fine for her to go to the movies with a boy. She wondered what Caleb was doing this weekend. Her parents and brother were walking towards her. *Maybe I'll text him on the way home,* Violet thought. She hoped he would be happy to hear from her.

THE END