

Understanding the Truancy of Migrant and Immigrant Children

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Abstract

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Truancy has become a growing problem among migrant students because many must continually leave their school district to follow the seasonal harvest. The high truancy rate among migrant students has caused concern among general education teachers, special education teachers, administrators, and parents. Due to the constant stress caused by relocation, migrant children face academic, social, and emotional hardships. Since they miss a significant amount of classroom instruction time they have difficulty performing on grade level and often perform poorly on standardized tests. Nonetheless, frequent relocations also affect their social and emotional stability in that they need to form new friendships on a frequent basis.

The mobility of migrant families and long working hours cause education problems of such significance that many migrant children become more truant, more so than other children in the educational system (Gibson & Hidalgo, 2009). Many migrant families do not realize that their children are missing opportunities in education and in life. It is clear that migrant children present a challenge to school.

Introduction

Truancy has become a growing problem among migrant students because many must continually leave their school district to follow the seasonal harvest. Due to the constant stress caused by relocation, migrant children face academic, social, and emotional hardships. The constant mobility of migrant families and long working hours causes a huge problem in their children's education and so many migrant children tend to become more truant than any other children in the educational system resulting in increased truancy number.

According to Green (2003), it is difficult for the migrant school children to adjust to school where they will be attending only a few months and then move again. Nonetheless, majority of the time the employment for migrant families is defined as seasonal and temporary. Migrant families need to travel to make ends and to make work continuous. They follow the harvest from state to state. For example, some will proceed to Arizona to pick lettuce and cauliflower, move to Utah to work sugar beets, oranges, and move back to California and work picking strawberries (Clare, 2002). Nonetheless, migrant families work very long hours, sometimes from sunup to sundown. Therefore, for this reason many migrant children tend to move year to year, and it is not surprising that in a single school year migrant children have attended schools in at least six or even eight other states.

Marcus (2008) described that the agriculture season crosscuts the school year by making regular attendance, learning at grade levels, accruing credits, passing state assessments, and meeting graduation requirements extremely difficult for migrant children. When migrant children accompany their parents following the crops they become vulnerable to drop out of the educational system and thus encounter many hardship throughout life. Migrant families, like others, would like a better life and

education for their children. Therefore, migrant families are obligated to provide in any given form shelter, food, and support to their children, even if this means to suffer and experience language barriers and psychological difficulties in the process of attending different schools throughout the year. This means that in reality many migrant children are more likely to lower their chance to attend college or have access to a higher education.

In fact majority of them may not even have the opportunity to complete high school because of the tremendous educational gap that they have accumulated due to their constant relocations. However, the purpose of this research is to investigate why migrant children tend to fall in the definition of truancy when most of their absenteeism is due to work. In accordance, the impact of frequent relocation poses unique social and emotional problems for many migrant children. It is clear that migrant students present a challenge to schools due to their parent's relocations and ways of work in the United States.

According to the Marcus's experience as member of a migrant family, migrant children suffer from continuous interruptions in their schooling and from falling behind in their classes. Also, migrant children tend to stay home from school to take care of their siblings or to help in the fields with their parents to support the family. Also in his experience, many migrant parents expect their children to assist in work or in the house. Marcus stated English language learners are one of the largest groups that earn lower standardized test scores than other peers who tend to stay in school. Migrant children and their families tend to arrive at any given time during the school year, depending on the crop season and may not stay there for a school year completion.

Literature Review

Truancy has a tremendous impact on the socialization and academic progress of migrant and immigrant children who are faced with frequent relocation (Dude & Orpinas, 2009). Therefore, the focus of this review will be to examine the literature of migrant and immigrant children and their constant mobility that cause them to become truant according to the educational code.

According to Kozoll and Garcia (2003), migrant families may only be in one location for a few weeks or months depending on the harvest season. For this reason the relocation of migrant children cause's truancy status as well as they face a hardship in the school system. Furthermore, migrant children do not comply with attendance regulations of various school systems. For example, in California a student becomes truant after being absent from school without a valid excuse three full days or tardy more than any 30 minute period during the school day without a valid excuse on three occasions in one school year, or any combination thereof, is a truant and shall be reported to the attendance superior of the superintendent of the school district.

According to many researches it is very important to explain to migrant families what truancy is according to the California Department of Education and the penalties parents may face regarding truancy. Nonetheless, according to Green (2003), it is difficult for the migrant children to adjust to school settings when they only have being expose to the type of work their parent do and not being able to complete a full academic year in one single school, which lead them to take drastic decisions as they grow older in following their parents footsteps of working in the fields because they feel that they will never catch in school. On the other hand many decide to drop out of school and continue working in other setting such as packing grapes to help their families. Many children are

discourage to keep moving for continuous employment because they leave friends and teachers behind but many migrant children obey their families and have to move with them. On the other hand many might be at an age that is hard for them to understand the constant mobility they encounter through their life. Attending school is an invaluable experience but for many migrant children is not possible due to their constant relocations through the United States.

According to Clare (2002), it is important to understand and communicate the importance of building relationships among migrant families when they move to another state. She suggested in her research that school personnel need to work closely with migrant communities to serve as liaisons in order to give the correct placement to the students and continue with their education. She advocated for programs where advocates help migrant children adjust to a new school environment and atmosphere. However, in providing community-based families' both orientation and advocates to work in having records transfer, curriculum, and graduation requirements in place for these migrant children who are leaving to another school it can improve the chance of success and truancy as well as lowering the rate of dropping out of school.

Nonetheless when programs or advocacy are in place it is important to explain to migrant parents what truancy is and how it may affect the education of their children when they move them to another school. Therefore, it will help migrant families to comply with the laws and school regulations when they arrive to another state for work if there is a well suited program that will oriented them and their children with key issues such as record transfer, curriculum constancy, and fulfillment of graduation requirements. On the other hand it is difficult for many migrant families to understand that their children will or may not receive the same education as they were in the previous state

they were due to language barriers such as dialect since the majority of migrant families speak Mixteco. However, the research shows that when schools have implemented programs based on migrant children's needs, they can and will accomplish their goals of a better education, since many migrant families migrate to this country for a more decent life and for a better education for their children.

According to Dr. Valencia (personal interview, 2011) it is challenging for many migrant children to adapt to a new school. He stated that migrant children's social dynamics are impaired because several times a year they have to adjust to new friends, different cultures, and a second language barrier, and that mobility-induced educational discontinuity is the single greatest challenge to migratory students. In his year of teaching he has seen that migrant children have the greatest difficulty to receive the proper education that migrant families wish and desire for their children. In his interview he also stated that he has met many migrant parents who have dreams for their children to perhaps attend college and to have a better life.

They do not want to see their children performing as migrants. Migrant parents constantly are encouraging their children to do well in school but unfortunately it is hard to keep that promise due to their constant relocation. However, as a son of migrant parents he agrees of the shortfalls migrant children experience and that their constant moves for employment bring academic, social, psychological, and emotional distress to the children and their families.

According to the Green's experience, migrant families need to travel to make ends meet, make work continuous, and keep encouraging their children to do well in the school they will be attending even if it is for a short period of time. Many times migrant children rather accompany their parents in the fields that encounter a new school or new

friends. It is hard for many migrant children to leave friends behind and always wonder if you are going to see them again, or perhaps going to bed and not knowing if the next day you will be attending the school or a different one. In fact, it is very critical for migrant families and their children to live this journey that many migrant children do not want to go to school at all or they do not want to start and then stop.

Conclusion

After reviewing the literature of migrant and immigrant children and the effects they encounter do to their constant mobility. It shows that in fact, most migrant children do not have a stable education due to the fact that they never finish a school year at a certain location. Therefore, when talking about migrant children, it involves discussion of their issues within the school system and educational community, such as a high dropout rates, delinquency, and in some cases substance abuse. From sociocultural perspectives, it is possible that a limited factor for migrant children to succeed in school, participate in socialization activities, and to engage in social network is to their constant mobility.

In addition, providing direct funding to schools for the implementation of programs that focuses on teaching and learning, standards and assessments as well as strengthening the school and family system would benefit migrant children and their families who constantly move to follow the harvest. However, many school system needs to have in place a well suitable personnel to help migrant families in requesting transfers from one district to another when they move to another state due to the harvest. Having the appropriate programs to help migrant children adjust to a new school environment and atmosphere is important and beneficial in order to decrease the number of trancies among this population (Rumberger, R., & Larson, K., (1998).

In improving resources to support schools in meeting the needs of migrant children and their families to achieve academic success is the first step to alleviate this truancy problem among migrant children. Since truancy has been clearly identified as one of the early warning signs of migrant children headed for social isolation, educational failure, dropping out, and potential delinquency.

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