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The Impacts of COVID-19 on Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Communities

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## **ABSTRACT**

Little is known about the experiences of United States migrant and seasonal agricultural workers and their families during the COVID-19 pandemic. This knowledge gap provided the purpose of this case study; to research how Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) teachers respond to the community's changing needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. I took a holistic and environmental view to consider social factors such as Covid-19, agricultural work, and punitive immigration on families and how to serve them. However, the paper's overall purpose is to look at the community's experiences during the COVID 19 pandemic and any long-term impacts they may face. In the tradition of Head Start as an education and community building program, my critical social lens provides understandings that marginalization, xenophobia, and exploitation, and other dehumanizing forces are not only exacerbated during times of economic downturn, but shift the focus of the program to a more holistic social service-oriented understanding.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES .....	iii
LIST OF TABLES .....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	v
Chapter 1 Rationale.....	1
Interest in Early Childhood Education Pre-K Students .....	1
Chapter 2 History and Demographics of Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Workers in the US Over Time .....	6
What is a Migrant and or Seasonal Agricultural Worker? .....	6
History of United States Agricultural Workers .....	7
Historic Employment Impacts on Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker During Historic Times of Economic Downturn: .....	13
Chapter 3 Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Overview .....	15
What is the Need for the Program?.....	15
Demographics of Migrant and Seasonal Head Start.....	16
Methodology .....	17
Chapter 4 The Tale of Two Centers.....	19
Chambersburg Pennsylvania: .....	22
Findings .....	27
Interview protocol.....	31
First Interview Questions: Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Center Director of the National Head Start Collaboration Office .....	32

**LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 1 US Farm Worker Trends Over Time : US Department of Agriculture .....	11
Figure 2 National Unemployment by Race and Ethnicity 2005-2017 .....	12
Figure 3 Agriculture Demand Over Time: Department of Agricultural Study 1989-2011	13

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Rationale**

#### **Interest in Early Childhood Education Pre-K Students**

My interest in children ages six months through 4 years was sparked when taking Dr. Valentes ECE 451 class, introduction to early childhood theory. In this course, we learned about the developmental importance of play in preschool for preschool-aged children through the teachings of scholar Vivian Paley. Through her stories and documentation, I sat alongside as she described with great detail how essential the act of playing was in young children learning. Rather than showing, she told how young children's learning is active. Play allows children a designated time to think, socialize, experiment, and problem-solve on their terms and understanding. Through play, children challenge themselves with new ideas and learning opportunities in physical, emotional, and cognitive development. (Barnett, 1990).

Agency and curiosity are inherent to children. Moreover, she demonstrated how playing allows children to explore and understand the world around them- it provides a structure for how imaginations and fantasies can interact constructively with the real world. As an illustration of the power of play, she offers a passage: Jason seldom responds, in casual conversation or more formal discussion. During play, however, he is advancing in this skill. How can the least structured activity, for which there is no primer or printed curriculum, promise the greatest practice in concentration on a subject? The answer, of course, is that fantasy play is not the least structured activity, though the structure.” (Paley, 1990, pg. 92).

My goal in learning about young children began with the tales of Paley. Yet the world many of these children lived in and through was drastically different than others I saw and experienced.

I became interested in migrant and seasonal students in the United States when taking Dr. David Post's Education Theory and Policy 435 class, *child labor, and the global economy*. Walking into EDTPH 435, I wore glasses of privilege. I, like many around me carried the misconception that in the United States, working children were high schoolers that were employed by a local mall or fast-food chain. I believed that children performing low-wage manual work was either eradicated in the 1920's or a thing of the "third world." However, after reading about child farmworkers in the United States, my view and understanding shifted. The fruit I eat, the vegetables I see in the supermarket were once in the hands of young children. And these children, unlike those Paley describes, spend their day in the fields. In listening to the lived realities of farmworkers, I thus considered what it would be like to fear deportation, live in poverty, change schools frequently and work before and sometimes even after school to contribute to the necessities of the family's needs.

### **Expanding my Knowledge on Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Students**

The second defining factor in my choice to pursue this avenue of research was taking Dr. Korhenberger's EDTPH 200 course, *educational reform and policy*. In EDTPH 200, the culmination of the course was policy proposal assignment geared to effectuate educational equity change. I decided I wanted to research educational programs available to migrant and seasonal preschool students.

Through my initial research, their lives and stories came to me. I learned that there it is estimated that there are more than three million migrant and seasonal farmworkers in the United States, including roughly 360,000 in Texas. (Wilt, 2016). Texas, like all other states, participates in the Migrant Education Program (MEP) authorized by Title 1 Part C of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which provides: "[A] high-quality education for all individuals is a societal good, morally imperative, and ultimately improves the life of every individual because the quality of our individual lives depends on the quality of the lives of others". However, Texas uses none of the funding from MEP on any form of early childhood education. Without sufficient educational programs, children are either left to work on farms, exposed to dangerous farming equipment and pesticides, or attend school programs where they are subjected to improper special education labels and are unprepared for kindergarten compared to their non-migrant. (Wilt, 2016).

I proposed the implementation of MSHS early childhood centers in Texas. Texas is one of only twelve states that does not already utilize MSHS. This means that children who move to Texas but were enrolled in MSHS in their previous state cannot re-enroll in Texas as they could if they migrated to any of the 38 states with the program. I believe this program would effectuate equitable education by implementing quality early childhood education for migrants and ensuring that current MSHS students in other states can stay in the program when they migrate to Texas. My fascination and drive to achieve educational equity for migrant and seasonal individuals, paired with my interest in preschool-aged students, fueled my honors thesis.

### **Thesis Focus**



My approach is a case study method – Using description and analysis I demonstrate the approaches of two separate programs. My goal is not to compare effectiveness, rather I seek to understand how they fulfilled the mission of Head Start and equity in these spaces. My lens centers cultural responsiveness- which I use in pursuit of answers to the following research questions:

In what follows, I will provide the background of migrant populations for a historical perspective, moving next into the development goals of Migrant and seasonal head Start.

Following a methodology section, I introduce the two cases:

My approach is ecological, I blend the classroom practices with the larger factors. In the tradition of ethnography, I intentionally spend more time and space on the lived realities of children and their families.

I conclude by synthesizing understandings of what two cases provide as we seek to understand the true concern of the pandemic.

My rationale for this study is both researches based and in pursuit of professional application. As an educator I aim to encourage discourse to promote understanding of others that take into account structural privilege. This includes understandings of power, privilege and social forces that enhance or detract from equity. From this we can effectively work together to make our classroom a loving, nurturing and inclusive environment. It is vital to promote shared emotions and understanding because it brings classrooms together and motivates them to work as one (Krechevsky & Stork, 2000), this will enable me to be an active agent in learning with my students. Deep connections will guide learning in our classroom. I will grow in relationships with my students in hopes to experience moments where we step to the same rhythm together (Paley,

1990). If I do not understand my students, I will never be able to assess them as their educator.

Further, without connection to my students I will not be able to join them on the pursuit of discovering meaning/knowledge via our classroom journey. The completion of this thesis gave me insights to the extent culture affects the way students and families think, learn, and involve themselves in the learning process.

## **Chapter 2**

### **History and Demographics of Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Workers in the US Over Time**

#### **What is a Migrant and or Seasonal Agricultural Worker?**

Migrant agricultural workers and Seasonal agricultural workers are often used as interchangeable terms. However, due to the vast difference in lifestyle these two groups face, many factors differentiate the needs of these families and the programs which serve them.

As defined by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, seasonal agricultural workers are "individuals who reside in living quarters owned, leased, or operated by an employer or a farm labor contractor and occupied by four or more unrelated individuals. For example, a Seasonal Farm Labor Camp is a living space that can include rooming houses, dormitories, and mobile homes. Employers can maintain these directly or indirectly as part of employing seasonal farmworkers.

Migrant agricultural workers on the other hand, as defined by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, are students who live "across a school district line with/or to join a migrant parent or guardian, or on their own, within the preceding 36 months, to obtain temporary or seasonal employment in qualifying agricultural or fishing work including agri-related businesses such as meat or vegetable processing."

The daily lives, affordances and approaches to these two make them an important subject of study. However, few educational researchers have focused on the education of this population, much less the ways in which ecological and political forces impact them.

## **History of United States Agricultural Workers**

Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural workers in the United States have been historically exploited. However, the demographics of migrant and seasonal agricultural workers in the United States have changed drastically over the last 100 years. Demographic change is attributable to many factors such as The United States 1882 Chinese exclusion act, the 1920s Mexican revolution, development of the United Farmworkers Union (UNF), and hostile agricultural worker rhetoric in the media resulting in a decrease in non-foreign documented United States citizens seeking jobs in the industry.

The first significant influx and Chinese immigrants entering the United States was triggered by the start of the California gold rush in 1848. However, the Chinese immigrants who came for the goldrush, became employed in various low wage labor industries, such as agriculture. (Soennichsen, J., 2011). By 1860 7 out of 8 migrant and seasonal agricultural workers were Chinese immigrants. American nationals were outraged. Nationalistic rhetoric claimed that Chinese immigrants worked for low pay and took too many job opportunities away from nationals. In response, the United States implemented the first significant law limiting immigration to the United States on race or ethnicity, the Chinese Exclusion act of 1882. (Soennichsen, J., 2011).

The government won, and the Chinese people swiftly fled the country. However, white nationals did not want to fill the agricultural field jobs that they left behind. American employers urged Japanese citizens to immigrate to the United States. (Soennichsen, J., 2011). But, as the Japanese population continued to grow, history repeated itself. Again, by 1905, the Japanese and Korean exclusion league of the United States had been established with four main goals: (Gyory, A. 1998).

1. Extension of the Chinese Exclusion Act to include Japanese and Koreans
2. Exclusion by League members of Japanese employees and the hiring of firms that employ Japanese
3. Initiation of pressure on the School Board to segregate Japanese from white children
4. Initiation of a propaganda campaign to inform Congress and the President of that "menace."

In response to anti-Japanese rhetoric, in 1907, the United States government made a "gentlemen's agreement" with Japan. Japan agreed not to allow further immigration into the country, but the United States would not put restrictions on immigrants already in the country... (Hajimu, M, 2015). Anti-Japanese rhetoric and racism in the United States slowly decreased the number of Japanese farm workers. Again, the United States was left with a labor shortage and sought out a new group of immigrants, Filipinos and Mexicans, to fill the agricultural labor shortage throughout the nation. (Hajimu, M, 2015).

Armed conflict in 1910-1920 in Mexico, known as the Mexican revolution, resulted in the first large-scale immigration of Mexicans to the United States. Moreover, during this same time, anti-immigration rhetoric was booming throughout the United States. During the 1920s, the

Klu Klux Klan (KKK) had the highest number of members ever recorded. (Molina, N, 2010). By 1925, there were 2 to 5 million active members of the KKK, with millions more supporters nationwide. The KKK had a clear plan during the 1920s to keep out immigrants who would destroy the nation's "white purity." Politicians listened, and in 1921, President Warren Harran signed the 1921 emergency quota act. (Molina, N, 2010). The emergency quota acts restricted immigration to only 3% of the number of foreign-born persons of such nationality throughout the United States. Section 2 and 3 of the quota acts read:

“SEC. 2. (a) That the number of aliens of any nationality who may be admitted under the immigration laws to the United States in any fiscal year shall be limited to three per centum of the number of foreign-born persons of such nationality resident in the United States as determined by the United States census of 1910, (b) For the purposes of this Act nationality shall be determined by the country of birth, treating as separate countries the colonies or dependencies for which separate enumeration was made in the United States census of 1910.

SEC. 3. That the Commissioner-General of Immigration, with the approval of the Secretary of Labor, shall, as soon as feasible after the enactment of this Act, and from time to time thereafter, prescribe rules and regulations necessary to carry the provisions of this Act into effect. 'He shall, as soon as feasible after the enactment of this Act, publish a statement showing the number of aliens of the various nationalities who may be admitted to the United States between the date this Act becomes effective and the end of the current fiscal year, and on Jun 30th thereafter he shall publish a statement showing the number of aliens of the various nationalities who may be admitted during the ensuing fiscal year."

The quota act excluded Mexican immigrants because United States farmers needed cheap labor. However, despite the national need for Mexican immigrants to sustain the national agricultural industry, Mexican immigrants experienced exploitation and racism in their local communities and on the job. Many shops, schools, and businesses restricted entry from Mexicans and other Hispanic ethnicities. Farmers had separate agricultural camps for laborers on race and ethnicity. Farmers did not want various groups to mingle and unionize together for better treatment and compensation. The horrific treatment of Hispanic farmworkers in the United States continued for many years to come after the 1920s.

Larry Itiliong, leader of the agricultural workers organizing committee (AWOC), had enough of the exploitation of farmworkers, and the majority of Filipino farmworkers agreed with him. Filipino agricultural workers were far more radical in their demands for justice than Mexican agricultural workers. (Scharlin, C., & Villanueva, L., 2011). In the 1930s and 40s, Itiliong started to make a change, he helped organize a union for cannery workers in Alaska, had lettuce strikes in Salinas, California, and led asparagus strikes in Stockton, California. Next, he went to Delano, California, to support grape workers. (Scharlin, C., & Villanueva, L., 2011). On Sept 7<sup>th</sup>, 1965, more than 2,000 Filipino grape workers walked out of the fields demanding better pay and the right to form a union. Because Filipino workers left the areas, farmers quickly hired Mexicans to replace them. Utilizing then realized the only way to get justice for farmworkers is for all ethnicities to work together. (Scharlin, C., & Villanueva, L., 2011).

In 1965, Larry Itiliong contacted Cesar Chavez, a Mexican agricultural worker and farmworker justice advocate, and explained why they must unite. If farmers knew workers were easily replaceable by someone else willing to work in poor conditions and for low compensation,

nothing would ever change. Chavez was hesitant, he felt that Mexican agricultural workers needed more time before they would be ready to join Itilong. (Ferriss, S., & Sandoval, R., 1997).

### Current understandings and approaches

The number and demographics of migrant and seasonal farmworkers in the United States are unknown. However, the national center for farmworker health reports the following demographics on seasonal and migrant agricultural laborers: This is because most migrant farmworkers fear the United States government. Years of xenophobic and racist policies and messages sent from the United States government, particularly immigration enforcement, make migrant and seasonal agricultural workers fear deportation regardless of their documentation status.

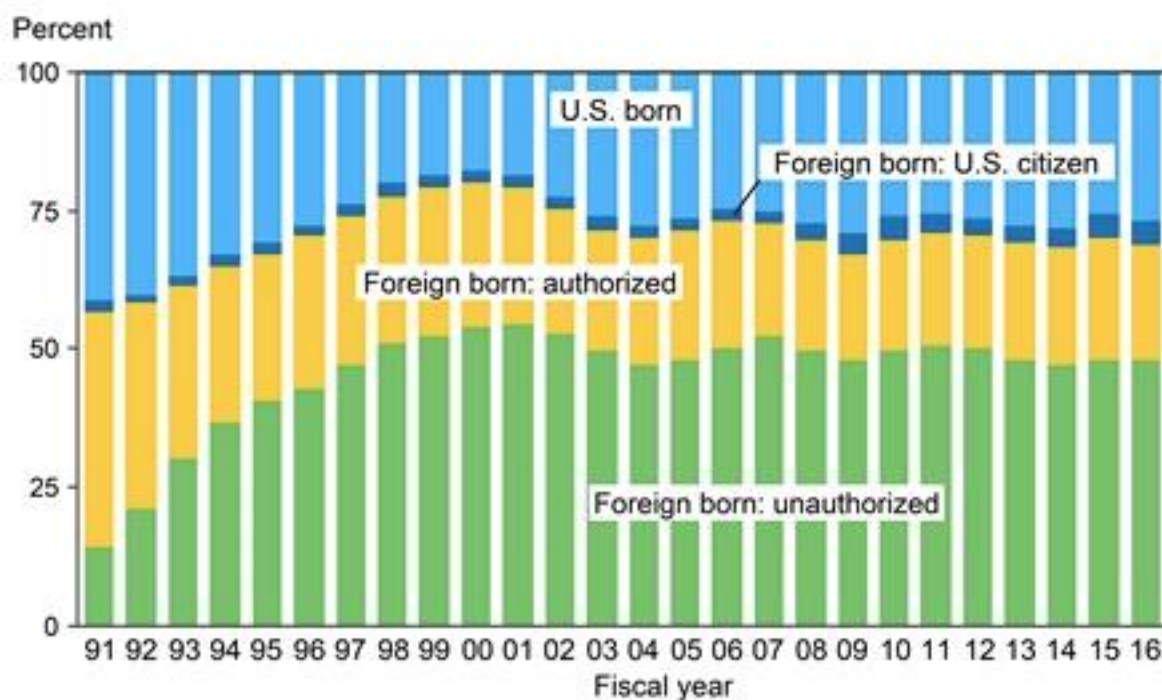


Figure 1 US Farm Worker Trends Over Time : US Department of Agriculture

### Historic Impacts on Minority Populations During Times of Economic Downturn



Examining recent times of economic downturn in the United States, such as the 1990-1991 recession, the 2008 recession, and the COVID-19 pandemic, it is evident that exploitation of minority communities is exacerbated. (Cockx, B., & Ghirelli, C., 2016). The exploitation of minority communities can be elucidated by considering numerous factors, such as decreased access to high wage employment, increased unemployment rates, and reduced access to healthcare compared to their white counterparts. Therefore, minorities have less access to emergency funds needed for necessities during times of economic downturn. (Cockx, B., & Ghirelli, C., 2016).

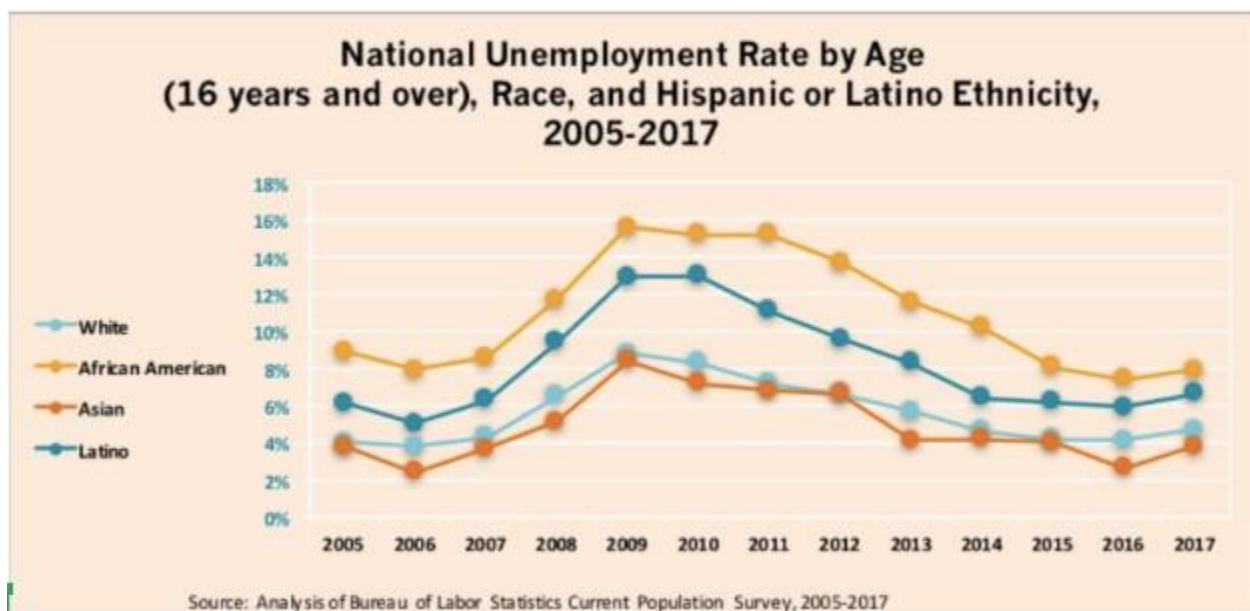


Figure 2 National Unemployment by Race and Ethnicity 2005-2017

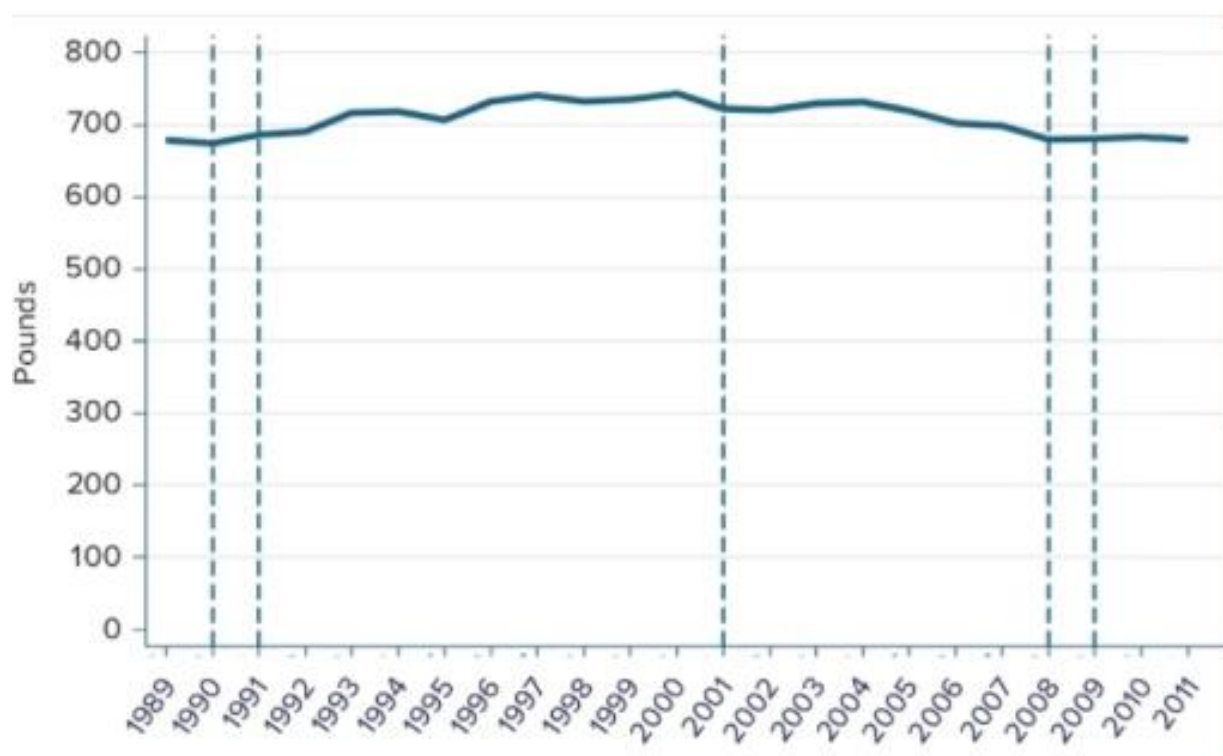


Figure 3 Agriculture Demand Over Time: Department of Agricultural Study 1989-2011

### **Historic Employment Impacts on Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker During Historic Times of Economic Downturn:**

The exploitive trends that minorities have faced during times of economic downturn is not consistent when considering United States migrant and seasonal agricultural workers' experiences. Indeed, documented workers' hourly earnings rose 4.7% during the 1990–1991 recession, 3.8% during the 2001 recession, and 5% during the Great Recession. Hourly wages for undocumented workers rose by 2.1% and 3.2%, admits the 1990–1991 and 2001 recessions, but remained consistent during the Great Recession. During historical United States recessions, the increase in wages for agricultural workers is attributable to decreased numbers of laborers paired

with constant demands for farm products. An estimated 50% of farmworkers in the United States are undocumented. (Fan, M., Pena, A. A., & Perloff, J. M, 2016). Historically, far fewer undocumented immigrants enter the United States from Mexico. Moreover, as shown below, the demand for agricultural products seldom correlates with the stability of the financial market. Therefore, farmers historically compensated Migrant and Seasonal Workers more to compensate for the labor gap by providing extended overtime hours and pay, typically unavailable during typical economic climates. (Fan, M., Pena, A. A., & Perloff, J. M, 2016).

## **Chapter 3**

### **Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Overview**

Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) is a government-funded early childhood center that serves the children of migrant agricultural workers ages six weeks through five years and pregnant women. The program provides services to help meet the cognitive, developmental, and socio-emotional needs of the children enrolled. Additionally, it provides medical and dental screenings and referrals, nutritional benefits, parental involvement activities, referrals to social service providers for the entire family, and mental health services. (Green, 2008).

#### **What is the Need for the Program?**

The children of Migrant and Seasonal agricultural workers have the highest dropout rate of any group of students in the United States. Many people are not familiar with Migrant and Seasonal head start, nonetheless the need for the program. Children in poverty who attend pre-k have less involvement in delinquency, reduced incidences of special education placement, and higher high school graduation rates than children who grew up in poverty but who do not attend pre-k. (Barnett, 2008). However, the impoverished children of migrant and agricultural workers face a host of challenges beyond that of other impoverished children, such as social and cultural isolation, strenuous and hazardous work, and limited English proficiency (Green, 2008). MSHS meets the specific needs of migrant children - often unique from the needs of other children in poverty. Indeed, poverty is common among children of migrant farmworkers and is a primary factor causing children to obtain agricultural employment at young ages. Migrant students drop

out at an estimated 45 to 60 percent (Wiseman, 2003). This is attributable to various equity issues, such as the migratory lifestyle of the students resulting in lack of health, identity, and other forms necessary for enrollment, thereby prohibiting some children from re-enrolling in a new school. (Office of Head Start, 2011) Moreover, most farmworker families come from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds and by enlarge are not aware of how different federal programs work in the United States.

### **Demographics of Migrant and Seasonal Head Start**

Those involved in the topic of MSHS programs include the students, their families, staff teachers, and government entities administering them. Eighty-eight percent of MSHS students live in homes where English is not their first language. Specifically, 83 percent of all MSHS students live in a home where Spanish is the first language, and four percent speak various Central/South American and Mexican Languages as their first languages. Other languages only account for one percent of the remaining students. (TRAC REPORT, INC, 2014). Not all MSHS children are enrolled through the traditional center-based program. Instead, 93 percent of MSHS placements for children are center-based care, meaning they attend an MSHS facility that runs similarly to a preschool or early childhood care center. Six percent of children enrolled through the MSHS program receive family childcare services, where children receive services in an approved, inspected, and staffed private home. One percent of students receive childcare and instruction in their homes. (TRAC REPORT, INC, 2014).

## **Methodology**

When conducting my research, I needed to have the opportunity to learn from informants to understand and make meaning of the members of the communities' lives. I started by researching administrative details of the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start program, such as how it is funded, who the grantees are, and how and who can I get in contact with members of the community.

### **A Comparative Case Study**

A case study is when a researcher strives to make sense of the context of a problem. Moreover, the ethnographic approach requires the researcher to observe the subject in real-world environments. Therefore, an ethnographic case study was the ideal way to answer my study's driving question: How can I learn from teachers/parents/children in this school community and contribute something to legitimizing their lives and lifeworld's during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a leap of faith, I started cold calling various Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Center locations throughout the United States to gain rich insights into the experiences of these individuals and their communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ultimately, I was able to gain insights via phone and zoom interviews with 23 different center directors, various state education coordinators, and the director of the National Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Collaboration Office, and I was able to visit and explore one Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Center during the school day. In addition, when developing my interview questions, I composed intentional questions framed to gain insights into the lived life worlds of migrant and seasonal agricultural employees enrolled in the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start federal program. I asked Interview Questions (See Appendix A)



## **Chapter 4**

### **The Tale of Two Centers**

From the beginning of my research, I had substantial understanding and evidence that the COVID-19 pandemic affected the United States economy and supply chain differently than any other recession in the past 100 years. It also greatly impacted families and the programs which served them. In what follows I will describe two programs located in central and north eastern Pennsylvania. I selected these programs

I began my work researching these two programs in the summer of 2020, shortly after the first wave of the pandemic hit the US. In this season, demand decreased exponentially for agricultural products; this is attributable to schools, resorts, and restaurants shutting their doors. I, like many other people were staying home, not visiting restaurants and the once bustling economy and businesses which supported them were on the decline.

What I would come to understand is that across local contexts, the experiences of migrant and seasonal workers throughout the pandemic varied tremendously. The salient factors attributable to considerable distinctions between members of the Migrant and Seasonal head start communities include the industry of employment, State political affiliation, distinctive community values, documentation status, and place of residence. While each center is unique, I use two programs to demonstrate the responsive aspect of the program to the children and to their community.

#### **Erie Pennsylvania**



Located in the North-Western region of Pennsylvania, Erie is the fourth largest city in Pennsylvania. It is largely white (about 66.9%) and smaller racial and ethnic populations than might be found in the top three. Nearly 15.1% of the population is black, and the next largest population with 8.64 % is Hispanic. At \$37,489, Erie's median income is half of the state median and about 28% of the population live below the federal poverty line.

Erie County is home to the most prominent catholic dioceses in Pennsylvania. Of the 289,450 residents, 103,333 claim affiliation with the Catholic Church. As I would come to understand, this affiliation played a significant role in the livelihood of many agricultural farmworkers, particularly as it was the grantee for the Head Start. Migrant and Seasonal Head Start of Erie County is owned and operated by the Benedictine Sisters of Erie County. The Benedictine Sisters of Erie have boosted awareness about agricultural workers' mistreatment throughout Erie County's Catholic dioceses. The diocese serves as an advocate, as I was told, the sisters urge church members to vote for policies to support the families Erie County Migrant and Seasonal Head Start serves.

The primary employment industries are electric locomotive building, tourism, and agriculture. However, the agriculture industry employs many of the families who are affiliated with Head Start. Many of these are grape farmers as Erie County is the second-largest grape-growing region in the United States. 72% of the grapes that contribute to Pennsylvania's 400-million-dollar grape industry are grown in Erie County. Erie County's ability to produce tremendous fruit yields is attributable to the region's location on *the concord grape fruit belt*. Fruit belts are found in areas surrounding the Great Lakes that exhibit excellent conditions for

fruit growing and cultivation. The Great Lakes “lake effect climate” results in cooler springs, warmer falls, and delayed frosts.

The migrant or seasonal worker industry weighed a considerable impact on the employment status of migrant and seasonal families during the COVID-19 pandemic. Agricultural workers of Erie County are primarily employed in grapes and faced high unemployment rates at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, in response to Pennsylvania State closing state liquor stores, the demand for wine throughout Pennsylvania plummeted. However, unlike most unemployed Americans throughout the United States, agricultural families in Erie County struggled to receive COVID-19 emergency funding.

In addition, there were pressures that were exacerbated following the 2016 election. And during the pandemic it has reached a pinnacle. The community surrounding the church is largely pro-immigrant. However, in interviews she mentioned that many families have halted their migratory lifestyle, largely out of fear. Agricultural families fear the migratory lifestyle will attract unwanted attention from the United States government.

Erie County Migrant and Seasonal Head Start center director said that historically, agricultural workers and their families were seasonal. This means that in the years past, families would primarily reside in agricultural labor camps.

Now, this has changed. Many families have first-hand knowledge of their friends and relatives being identified by the United States government as undocumented. The fear is in response to years of anti-immigration and xenophobic policies. The families have seen loved ones separated, placed in immigration detention centers, and deported. All of these fears were exacerbated by officials telling the United States media that increased transmission of COVID-19

resulted from individuals crossing the United States-Mexico border. As I would come to learn, Families felt like even if they were documented citizens or had a visa, they were still in grave danger of deportation.

The families think, "If you are brown, poor, do not speak a lot of English, the United States immigration enforcement does not care; they assume you are undocumented." As a result, the Erie County Migrant and Seasonal head start have shifted from a "true migratory operation" to a "true seasonal operation."

Families felt isolated, scared, and confused at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many families without access to WIFI or cell phones did not have access to the news. Furthermore, many families struggled to find trustworthy news sources that had been translated into their native language.

### **Chambersburg Pennsylvania:**

Located in South Central Pennsylvania, is the small town of Chambersburg Pennsylvania. It is a largely white space (about 77%) and smaller racial and ethnic populations can be found in the other top three. Nearly 16% of the population is Hispanic, and the next population with 8.4% is Black. Chambersburg is a large farming community with an emphasis on corn, wheat and barley.

Unlike the majority of Migrant and Seasonal Head Start grantees, Chambersburg Migrant and Seasonal Head Start still predominately serves migrant families. The center is open during the local communities peak growing season, July-October. In October, the Chambersburg Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Center Director works with the families she serves, by finding

a nearby center where the family is migrating to for the child to re-enroll. From what I am told, the majority families live on the farms in agricultural living quarters or often times in “under the table short term rentals”.

The prevalence of students residing in agricultural labor camps made it difficult for Chambersburg Migrant and Seasonal Head Start to safely re-open during the COVID-19 pandemic. Farm labor camps, as defined by the Pennsylvania Department of Agricultural are: "living quarters, including housing accommodations, motels, rooming houses, dormitories, and mobile homes maintained directly or indirectly in connection with any work of or place where work is being performed by seasonal farmworkers, whether or not rent is paid or reserved for use or occupancy. The Seasonal Farm Labor Act and regulation sets standards for conditions of work, living quarters, occupancy, camp sanitation, food facilities, fire protection, and safety of seasonal farmworkers. This program applies to: One or more individuals employed in agricultural labor on a seasonal or other temporary basis AND camps owned, leased, or operated by an employer or farm labor contractor where four or more unrelated individuals occupy the camp.” The poor conditions of agriculture labor camps put students and families alike under difficult circumstances for students to reach their full potential of academic attainment. The following are the minimum requirements that must be provided in PA agricultural labor camps:

- “Equipment provided to adequately heat all habitable rooms, bathrooms, showers and laundry rooms to 68°F from September 15<sup>th</sup> to May 15<sup>th</sup>.
- Hot water of at least 120°F and cold water shall be supplied to all kitchens, lavatories, showers, tubs and laundry fixtures. 50 ft<sup>2</sup> per adult person of usable

floor space shall be provided in dormitories /sleeping rooms shared by unrelated workers.

- 100 ft<sup>2</sup> per adult person of usable floor space shall be provided in living units (houses) where occupants cook, live and sleep.

- 50 ft<sup>2</sup> per adult person of usable floor space shall be provided in dormitories/

sleeping rooms shared by unrelated workers.

- 100 ft<sup>2</sup> per adult person of usable floor space shall be provided in living units

(houses) where occupants cook, live and sleep.

- Each occupant shall be provided with a bed frame, mattress and cover, pillow,

sheets and blankets.

- Beds, bunks or cots shall be elevated at least 12'' from the floor and spaced at

least 36'' apart. Bunks shall be spaced 48'' apart with at least 27'' of space

between the upper and lower bunk. Triple bunks are prohibited.

- Each occupancy must be provided with storage space such as wall lockers or

closets, 3-feet of rod and shelving, a dresser or equivalent in the sleeping rooms.

Potable water is to be supplied at all times.

- Public water systems shall comply with the standards under the PA Safe

Drinking Water Act. Non-public water systems must test annually for total coliform and nitrites/ nitrates if a non-community water supply is used.

- All workers shall be supplied with a source of cool potable water at them worksite in a ratio of one drinking fountain for each 100 workers/crew or 10 gallons of potable water for each 100 workers/crew. Toilet facilities adequate for capacity and separate for sexes must be supplied and maintained in the following ratios:

- 1 – 5 workers = 1 chemical toilet seat, water closet or privy seat
- 6 – 30 workers = 2 chemical toilet seats, water closets or privy seats
- 31 – 45 = 3 chemical toilet seats, water closets or privy seats
- 46 – 60 = 4 chemical toilet seats, water closets or privy seats, etc.

(Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, An Operator Guide to Farm Labor Camps)

During the COVID-19 pandemic, various laws and regulations were put into place in efforts to better residents of farm labor camps. However, I have been told this did not happen in Chambersburg, PA without the advocacy of Head Start.

The migrant or seasonal worker industry weighed a considerable impact on the experiences of migrant and seasonal families during the COVID-19 pandemic. Particularly, the demand for ethanol, a chemical made from corn used for gasoline in cars and airplanes, collapsed drastically. Between March and April 2020, travel was discouraged and even restricted across the nation, diminishing the need for ethanol. As a result, ethanol demand and production plummeted 48% and 47%, respectively, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Migrant and Seasonal Head Start communities in states with a high volume of corn production, such as Chambersburg Pennsylvania, faced considerable impacts.

#### **Medical Care Access:**

Examining the average income of migrant and seasonal agricultural workers is challenging because many individuals are paid "under the table," resulting in the gain never being recorded. It is estimated that migrant and seasonal agricultural workers are compensated on average \$10.60 per hour. (National Farm Workers Association, 2020). However, I have been told it is even less for families in the Chambersburg area. The low wages of Migrant and Seasonal agricultural workers prohibited many migrant and seasonal agricultural workers from receiving medical care in response to illnesses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **Access to Staff During COVID-19:**

Migrant and Seasonal Head Start is committed to employing bilingual staff to meet the educational needs of the students. However, because Chambersburg is predominately a white space, Migrant and Seasonal Head Start of Chambersburg employs seasonal staff from Puerto Rico. Therefore, it made it difficult for Chambersburg Migrant and Seasonal Head Start to

provide the support centers with readily available bilingual staff was able to in other regions across the United States.

## **Findings**

My research gave me a close real look into the lives of many migrant and seasonal agricultural workers and families during the COVID-19 pandemic throughout various regions of the United States. Throughout this research, I have learned that there was not a cookie cutter experience of the stories of the experiences of Migrant and Seasonal Head Start communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many factors were attributable to an agricultural families' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic; such as ,industry of employment, documentation status, residential status, and community values.

In efforts to effectuate educational equity, a goal of Migrant and Seasonal Head Start is to build students English Language skills. The utility of gaining English Language skills is to enable students to be, and view themselves, as successful in United States public school's general education classroom. Moreover, I was told common deficit seen across Migrant and Seasonal Head Start communities was a decrease in Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Student's English language retention, literature comprehension, and phonics skills. I have been told this is most likely in result of students spending ample time in lockdown speaking their native language.

My research gave me profound insights in understanding the importance of learning from informants when learning about, evaluating, and most importantly, writing policies to effectuate educational equity. Indeed, a communities' culture impacts the educational needs of a



community, and therefore, should be considered by Migrant and Seasonal Head Start when evaluating the and implementing policy.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Interview protocol**

#### Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Center Directors

1. Tell me about yourself and what brought you into this position.
2. Tell me about your center's area and the local community's values.
3. Are the families primarily migrant or seasonal? Has this shifted at all in the past 5-10 years?
4. What sector of the industry are your families primarily working? How may this industry have impacted them that may be different from other agricultural laborers?
5. What can you tell me about the families that your center serves? I know they are migrant and seasonal agricultural workers, but can you paint a picture for me of a day inside their lives?
6. What strengths do these families bring to the table?
7. What hardships do these families endure?
8. How has COVID impacted the teachers at your center?
9. Have you noticed or documented any changes in the student's behavior or academic progress since the pandemic?
10. What was the most challenging part about covid for the families you serve?
11. Did documentation status affect the impact of a family?

12. If any families you serve reside in farm labor camps, were farms following the required protocols for COVID protection? If not, what did this look like? Did this impact the students in any way?
13. Were families at the center you serve eligible or receive federal funding in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?
14. How did federal government policy affect the families that you serve?
15. How did state government policy affect the families that you serve?
16. How did local government policy affect the families that you serve?

**First Interview Questions: Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Center Director of the National Head Start Collaboration Office**

1. Tell me about the program, I already know what I have researched, but I want to hear what you say. What do you think the program's biggest strengths are and the weaknesses?
2. How did you become the director of this program?
3. What is your interest in working with Migrant children?
4. What are some strengths of the families enrolled in Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Programs?
5. What are some of the struggles the families enrolled in Migrant and Seasonal Head Start enduring?
6. What were the most significant impacts on your families since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?

7. What are the differences across MSHS centers across the United States? Did the impacts vary between the centers?
8. Do you think the families will continue to be impacted?
9. How have policies from the federal government impacted your program and families?
10. What are you genuinely looking for in a teacher?

**Interview with Education Coordinator Research Questions:**

1. How did you come into this position?
2. What does your role involve?
3. What sectors of agriculture do the families you serve work in primarily?
4. What are some of the strengths of the families?
5. Does a student's status as a migrant VS seasonal student impact their academic achievement?
6. What are some of the academic strengths of the children?
7. What are some of the academic weaknesses of the children?
8. What are regular assessment strategies used in your state? How are these assessments given?
9. Do all students have the option to take the assessment in their native language?
10. Have you assessed, or are you aware of any academic?

**Second Interview Questions for Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Center Director of the National Head Start Collaboration Office:**

1. What services did the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start federal program provide for grantees to meet the needs of the families?
2. Were all funds equally dispersed among all grantees? If not, how was funding allocation determined?
3. Have students been academically assessed since the beginning of the pandemic?
4. If students were assessed, how did assessment administration vary by state?
5. How did federal policy impact reopening procedures?
6. How did State policy impact reopening procedures?
7. How did federal policy impact a family's eligibility for emergency COVID-19 relief federal funding?
8. How did state policy impact a family's eligibility for emergency COVID-19 state funding?
9. Has the number of students enrolled fluctuated since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic?
10. Have the families you serve continued to have increased encounters with ICE due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

## ACADEMIC VITA

### Hannah M. Larkin

#### Education

**The Pennsylvania State University || Schreyer Honors College** **University Park, PA**  
*Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Education; Minor in Education Public Policy* *Anticipated May 2022*

- Awards and Recognition: Dean's List 7 out of 7 semesters; Featured Speaker at *Global Climate Strike* protest, *Fern Stein Rumph Elementary Education Scholarship* recipient
- Activities: *Penn State College Democrats*; *Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA)*, *Penn State Schreyer for Woman Club member*

#### Professional Experience

**The State College Friends School** **State College, PA**  
*Grade 2-3-4 Classroom Student Teacher* *September 2021 to May 2022*

- Write and implement lessons
- Communicate with parents
- Foster community values
- Meet all responsibilities of a lead classroom teacher

**CUNA Mutual Group** **Madison, WI**  
*Learning and Knowledge Management Intern* *June 2021 to August 2021*

- Write, design, and create online learning modules for various business units
- Meet with subject matter experts across various business units
- Presented and taught classes to audiences of 200+ learners

**Easter seals Child Development Center; Infants through Pre-k 4** **State College, PA**  
*Lead Teacher - Substitute* *September 2020 to Present*  
*Assistant Teacher - Full Time* *May 2020 - August 2020*

- Plan and teach sensory and art lessons
- Curriculum development
- Make accommodations for students with disabilities

**Our Children's Center - Montessori School** **State College, PA**  
*Assistant Teacher* *August 2019 - March 2020*

- Prepare literature lessons for a 3-4-5 year Montessori pre k classroom
- Observe students during assignments to document academic strengths and weaknesses
- Teach lessons on acceptable social and interpersonal behaviors and interactions
- Work with emergent bilingual students to develop English capabilities

**PAWS-Penn State Work Study** **State College, PA**  
*Elementary school Tutor* *August 2020-June 2021*

- Help students third – eighth grade complete homework assignments
- Email parents every evening after sessions with updates
- Assist struggling students with concepts they do not understand in their classes

#### Skills

- Proficient in Microsoft Office Word, PowerPoint, Excel, and adobe spark
- Strong interpersonal communication and problem-solving skills

#### Volunteerism

- Easter seals student fund raiser
- Shalom house for women and children food server