

Who Will Hear Me? The Study of a Migrant Worker Turned Agricultural Teacher

Rigo Chaparro
PO Box 110540, Gainesville, FL 32611-2060
435.279.0415
rchaparro@ufl.edu

Carla Jagger
PO Box 110540, Gainesville, FL 32611-2060
352.294.1992
carlajagger@ufl.edu

Who Will Hear Me? The Study of a Migrant Worker Turned Agricultural Teacher

Introduction/Need for Research

With just over 275,000 seasonal work permits approved in 2022 (United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), n.d.) there are many families that are brought to the United States to work seasonally within the agricultural industry. These jobs vary depending on the geographic location and need of the industry at the time of arrival. With the arrival of these families comes their children who are enrolled into public education during the duration of their stay (Free et al., 2015). These children bring with them a wealth of knowledge and experience that can diversify and uplift the current agricultural education classroom throughout our public education system (Barajas et al., 2020). Thus, emerges a need for culturally inclusive agriculture education classrooms that build environments that are inviting and inclusive for migrant youth (Barajas et al., 2020). The researchers for this study wanted to better understand the lived experiences of migrant youth within the public education system and their interactions with agricultural education during their secondary education experience.

This study worked with an individual who came to this country on a migrant visa with his family. Through the lens of both the individual and his wife this narrative based qualitative study looks at this couples' lived experiences. The male participant completed his secondary educational experience while working on a strawberry farm and decided to become a secondary agricultural teacher. This study aims to learn what impacted this student's decision to become an agricultural teacher and how they leveraged their cultural wealth and experiences to meet the challenges experienced in the public education system.

Conceptual Framework

This study was grounded in the anti-deficit framework for achievement (Harper, 2010). This framework challenges the traditional beliefs that diverse students within the classroom are at a disadvantage due to their biological, social, or inferred differences. This is especially true when considering English language learners (ELL's). This framework works to identify the cultural strengths and resources that an individual has access to and has leveraged within K-12 education. This framework was developed to combat the mindset that African American youth come to the education environment inherently disadvantaged due to their racial origins. Although this framework was primarily designed for African American male's research supports its application to the Latinx community (Harper, 2014; Perez, 2017).

Methodology

The participants of this study were selected from a cohort of preservice agricultural teachers. Selection criteria were determined due to the unique experiences and insights the participants had in addressing the purpose of the study. A personal interview was conducted in a narrative fashion with the pre-service agricultural teacher and their spouse. After the participants shared their story, the researcher followed with several questions guided by the anti-deficit achievement framework. Data was analyzed using qualitative coding methods such as developing codes in line with the anti-deficit achievement framework. All codes were grouped,

and general themes emerged from the research (Saldana, 2016). Due to the number of participants and nature of this study results and findings are constricted to the specific lived experiences of the participants and are not generalizable to the Latinx demographic as a whole. Trustworthiness for this study was established through member checking, peer debriefing, field notes, and reflexive journaling.

Results/Findings

After careful review of initial data several themes began to emerge. The first theme to emerge was that lived experience within agriculture created a desire to give back through education. For example, participants mentioned that as they are in classroom, the participant felt empowered by their knowledge of agriculture and confident in their ability to leverage their students' access to agriculture for the benefit of all students in their classroom. The general agricultural classroom culture served as a deterrent for participating within the program. The participant mentioned how the demographic of their agriculture program was dissimilar to them and they felt that it was an insurmountable difference. Agriculture teachers are the key to Latinx youth participation within the program. Although participants were not a part of their secondary agricultural education program, they felt that had the teacher made an effort to communicate or prioritize their needs it would have been easier to join the program. Perceived lack of resources prevented youth participation. The participant mentioned how although agricultural education program events were advertised, he never felt like he could participate due to lack of transportation to and from the event especially if it occurred before or after school. Lastly, familial and cultural assets were leveraged in response to barriers, specifically faith and a hard-working work ethic.

Conclusions

Findings from this study are restricted specifically to the two individuals who participated. Though these experiences cannot be generalized they do serve as a foundation for additional research when looking at the lived experiences of migrant workers and their unique journeys in becoming agricultural teachers. The findings highlight the role of the agricultural teachers in both creating an inclusive culture and being the bridge that allows for the Latinx population to participate in agricultural education as supported by the findings of Barajas et al. (2020). Having Latinx teachers within the agricultural classroom could help to build a conducive culture that attracts Latinx youth due to their exposure and understanding of the Latinx culture.

Implications/Recommendations/Impact on Profession

As the agricultural profession continues to grow and as we continue to face a shortage of agricultural teachers (Eck & Edwards, 2019), finding individuals with hands on experience and a passion for the industry could be found within the migrant communities and should be explored for recruitment and retention of agricultural teachers. While this study was conducted with only two participants it is recommended to expand this qualitative study to include greater numbers of migrant workers preferably throughout the country to see if the needs and experiences vary and to add reliability to the findings of this study. As a profession creating culturally inclusive programs allows for organic recruitment and retention of diverse agricultural educators.

References

- Barajas, G., Crump, M. K., Vincent, S. K., & McCubbins, O. P. (2020). Somos nosotros! Lived experiences of Latinx ELL youth enrolled in secondary agricultural education. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 61(4), 143-155. <http://doi.org/10.5032/jae.2020.04143>
- Eck, C. J., & Edwards, M. C. (2019). Teacher shortage in school-based, agricultural education (SBAE): A historical review. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 60(4), 223-239. <https://doi.org/10.5032/jae.2019.04223>
- Free, J. L., Križ, K., & Konecnik, J. (2014). Harvesting hardships: Educators' views on the challenges of migrant students and their consequences on education. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 47(3), 187-197. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2014.08.013>
- Harper, S. R. (2010). An anti-deficit achievement framework for research on students of color in STEM. In S. R. Harper & C. B. Newman (Eds.), *Students of color in STEM: Engineering a new research agenda* (pp. 63-74). Jossey-Bass.
- Harper, S. R. (Ed.). (2014). *Succeeding in the city: A report from the New York City Black and Latino male high school achievement study*. University of Philadelphia, Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education.
- Perez, D., II. (2017). In pursuit of success: Latino male college students exercising academic determination and community cultural wealth. *Journal of College Student Development*, 58(2), 123-140.
- Saldana, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage.
- United State Department of Agriculture. (n.d.). *Farm Labor*. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/farm-economy/farm-labor#h2a>