

LIU Opportunites Center

INTRODUCTION

The Opportunity Center is a day care center housed near Aspers and Bendersville Pennsylvania. It is one of many programs under the Migrant Education Program that is operated out of the Lincoln Intermediate Unit #12. I became extremely interested in the Opportunity Center after reading about the lives of Mexican immigrant farm workers in the US, and being exposed to various forms of early education programs for the children of migrant farm workers. It was because of this interest that I decided I wanted to intern with the migrant early education programs, and that the Opportunity Center was the early education program that I wanted to work with. Through interning there I became even more impressed with The Opportunity Center as a social service provider. But I wanted to look further into what I saw at the Center and find out how it was developed, how the Center is representative of migrant education on a national level, what type of values the Center encourages, and how many of those values are American based.

So, that is precisely the purpose of my research; to find out what the Opportunity Center is, what it does, the historical background of the Center and how it has changed, how the Center relates to migrant education on a nation level, and how the Center fits into American ideology by encouraging American ideals.

METHODOLOGY

The methods I used to complete this study consisted of working at the center. I talked with Parker Coble, the retired director of Lincoln Intermediate Unit's Migrant education, of which the Opportunity Center is under, and Dr. Leon, the new director of the Migrant Education Program.

I conducted many informal interviews with the director of the Center, Lori Grim. In addition to that I conducted a formal oral history with her as a follow-up interview. I conducted many informal interviews with the teachers of the class I was working with. One of those teachers, Rome, had been there for 21 years. I did informal interviews with most of the other teachers at the center as well.

I did research at the National Apple Museum and the National Historical Society in Adams County. I included the formal Oral History that I took part in with Pat Golden. The interview with Pat Golden was very informative because it gave me a perspective of the Opportunity Center from the white community of York Springs, of which 1/3 of the students attending the center are from.

In addition to the above, I also used the oral histories of Parker Coble, Edgar Leon, and Grogan Ullah, as sources of both the Opportunity Center and migrant education as a whole.

WHAT THE OPPORTUNITY CENTER IS AND WHAT IT DOES

The Opportunity Center primarily serves as a day care center for children of immigrant farm workers. It has been through the implementation of the teachers and directors who have been working there that the Center has become a "preschool" with a major emphasis on education. The Center's mission is to help make the children productive participating members of society.

The Center works with the public school system, Rural Migrant Head Start, and Regular Head Start to pull all the necessary resources together for program planning and development and for the parents. The Center provides each student with two square meals a day and transportation to and from school.

The Opportunity Center puts a huge emphasis on working with the community in their weekly schedules and program planning. They do a lot of networking to place their children into public schools, regular Head Start and Migrant Head Start. Grim says that one of their primary goals under the Migrant County Program is to assist the children and families in accessing all the programs in the county that are available to them.

One of the most important aspects of the Opportunity Center is their positive promotion and implementation of bilingual education. According to both Parker Coble and Grogan Ullah, the quickest way for a child to learn English is through bilingual education. The teachers at the Center try to do and say most things in both Spanish and English. The children are encouraged, but not forced, to speak, read, and learn in both languages. Whenever the children go on a field trip or a speaker comes in, the teachers translate everything for the students.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE OPPORTUNITY CENTER AND HOW IT HAS CHANGED

A). CREATION OF THE OPPORTUNITY CENTER

In 1962 the county superintendent of schools went to Parker Coble and said he wanted to start a migrant education program. He wanted someone like Coble, who grew up on a farm and knew most of the farming community, to help set up the program. The superintendent thought that Coble would be a good example and that Coble would know where to get the kids. Coble would be in charge of recruiting the kids in the evenings and transporting them to and from school. It started as a summer program job and has grown into a huge program that now covers over 30 counties in Pennsylvania. (Oral History, Coble)

The Opportunity Center originally started because of the problems farmers were having with child labor; parents had nowhere to keep their children while they worked, besides in the fields with them. Agricultural employers were a vital part of encouraging the government to start migrant education programs and child care because they did not want to be responsible for injuries occurring to the children. According to Parker Coble, there were even incidents where

kids used to stay in the car with the windows up and used to die because of heat stroke and suffocation. Employers wanted programs to reduce the child labor situations, but even more importantly to get them out of their fields to keep dangerous injuries from occurring.

Farmers also wanted to keep children out of the fields for economic reasons. They had to pay high amounts of insurance with having kids in the field, and high amounts of liability insurance. Before The Opportunity Center was built there was a small day care program that moved from church basement to church basement. This service was not adequate

enough to solve the problems of the farmers so farmers. So The Opportunity Center was built.

The Opportunity Center is now a fraction of Migrant Education, operated under The Lincoln Intermediate Unit #12. According to Lori Grim "we continue ... to work hard to educate the Lincoln Intermediate Unit and for the Lincoln Intermediate Unit to educate the migrant child development program about ... the vast differences and similarities among or between our programs." When the Opportunity Center was founded thirty years ago, they were founded by the Lincoln Intermediate Unit #12. According to Grim, they left their initial relationship with L.I.U based on the fact that "the LIU was only serving a three county area where the migrant child development program serves a thirty county area". When they separated from LIU they were then sponsored by Shippensburg University. They have again been associated with LIU for the past 10 years.

B). FUNDING

Today most of the funding for the Opportunity Center comes from the migrant day care budget. According to Grim this is "money set aside in the state budget specifically for child care for children of migrant farm workers. It is a set aside dollar figure in the governor's budget and that funds the majority of our operations here." But the usage of this money requires that the Center, and the children it provides for, meet specific criteria. So Grim says that they supplement the Opportunity Center with some migrant education funds and state migrant education funds. They also make use of some child and adult care food program funds. She states that "there's currently about four different funding sources. That has changed over the years because the migrant day care moneys have not increased over the years and some of the criteria for utilization of the migrant daycare funds has become more specific. For those two reasons then we've needed to bring in the use of additional funds or the other funding sources.@

C). CHANGES IN POPULATION SERVED

One of the biggest differences Lori Grim has noticed in the Opportunity Center over the years is that the population it serves has changed. She states that "when I started over fifteen years ago the migrant population was comprised of Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Haitians, some Vietnamese ... and Anglos and blacks". She says that "Today October 21st 1998 the majority of the children I have enrolled here are all Mexican. So there are some changes in the ethnicity of the people that are moving into the areas to do the work." She also identifies some other differences when she states that "there is also a change in the movement pattern of people coming in that are considered migrants. Fifteen years, ten years ago there was definitely a harvest season where people came to Adams County in July or August, picked apples and left Adams County at the end of October to mid November and went back to Florida, Texas, or somewhere else". The difference now is that, today "there are more families that are residing in Adams County for the majority of the year".

Parker Coble has recognized this himself and backs it up when he says that there has been a big change in the ethnic background of the people the migrant education programs serve. He says that when he started in 1962 they primarily served "southern whites and blacks". They left at the end of October. He said after that there were then more and more Puerto Ricans under the "Puerto Rican contract". Then there were Jamaicans and Haitians. Coble says that the Mexcians first moved in "in 1964 in Ardentsville, PA". Coble said that today, the population they serve is "90% Mexican".

D). THE EVOLUTION OF THE CLASSROOM

Grim says that "each classroom has a daily schedule that again has evolved over the years and is flexible and may change from year to year depending on what we think are the needs of the class." She says that the lesson plans have changed over they years. This is because "over the years as the area of early childhood education has evolved and real credence has been given to the fact that children learn a lot by playing and interacting with materials I think that you probably would find our lesson plans are more child oriented and have evolved more out of what the

children bring with them, what skills they have, and what skills they obviously need to work on to be developed. So maybe we are not as academic or we're not as structured, not as structured without flexibility." She continues "we still do have structure in our day, but we are flexible and if an activity is going really well and the children are engaged, rather than immediately ending it because it's time to do something else we have the flexibility to go with that and go with the kids."

E). PARENTAL CONCERNS

The parental concerns have dramatically altered since the Opportunity Center was first established. Grim states "I think back when the Migrant Day Care originated and even fifteen years ago when the families moved here and their primary need was child care. They needed a safe place for their children to be when they were in the orchards so I would say fifteen, twenty years ago for those families that moved in that was their primary goal." Grim continues, "And over time we have evolved into well 'we have these kids all day long, let's do something that truly is meaningful and educational to the program', and that's how we've developed, but yeah, originally it was child care".

F). PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

The parents are very involved with their children's lives. At the second Open House at the Opportunity Center 22 out of 26 families attended. According to Grim "I see the kids and their families at soccer practices when I'm there with my own kids. I see them at games. I see

them at public school PTO meetings. I see them at community library programs, so I see them in situations that are above and beyond my work." This is something that has really changed over the years. It has changed because of things that have been happening that allow the Mexican

community to get involved. Grim recognizes this, when discussing the changes in involvement, by stating "I think it's mostly because a lot of these families are here for longer amounts of time".

She continues, "The families that used to come and harvest the apples, they would come and their kids would come here [referring to the Opportunity Center], they picked apples from sun up to sun down and when the apple was done their

job was over and they moved on." Grim continues to explain that "that didn't allow them to do soccer or public school PTO or things like that and so they didn't have the time and maybe the necessity, or couldn't really see the need to do those types of things. So I think as the families are settling out and being here more, and plus there are more and more Hispanic families, not just migrant families, but Hispanic families that are settling out in the community. So I don't think they necessarily feel isolated anymore because they have peers, they have families that are of their own ethnic background that live here."

G). RELATIONSHIP WITH RURAL OPPORTUNITIES INC.

The relationship the Opportunity Center has with ROI has changed over the years. Currently the relationship they have with ROI, especially the East Coast Migrant Head Start Center, according to Grim, consists of "a lot of referrals or sitting down and talking about families who may have an infant at their center and have an older child at my center and I have sat down with their director and we'll talk about when we have our evening activities planned so that we're not planning activities on the same night." Grim continues, "Generally we try not to do it the same week so that families aren't feeling like they have so many obligations to go to. So we try to coordinate our programs, our evening programs, that way." It seems to be a very positive working relationship. Grim states that "our relationship I think has improved over the years ... when Rural Opportunities East Coast Migrant Head Start first came into the area I think their was some sense of feeling of competition as far as where the children would go. I think that feeling has kind of proved to be unfounded and wasn't necessary. We do in fact refer children back and forth and try to find the service provider that can most effectively meet the needs of the family".

H). ADJUSTMENT INTO AMERICAN SOCIETY

The children of the migrant farm workers seem to be making a much better adjustment into American society than in the years past. A lot of this is due to the fact that their families are staying in the area longer and many more are chasing to reside here. Grim stated before that the fact that the families are staying here longer and chasing to reside here has given the parents a better opportunity to be involved with their children's lives, the community, and to build their own community. When Grim made reference to seeing more Mexicans at soccer practices and PTO

meetings, she continued by saying "I see them in the community and that to me means they are adjusting and that they are feeling comfortable going out and reaching out to what is available in the community. I think that is a real positive for the families, and certainly for the kids." In

reference to the children's adjustment to American society Grim says, "I think the kids are doing well and I think that with continued focus on learning English and with the community recognizing that you don't learn a second language over night and you don't learn it in a year and often it takes five to seven years to really learn a second language, I think if we are all aware of that, the adjustment can be pretty easy."

I). A PARTICULAR FAMILY HIGHLIGHTED

In her oral history interview, Lori Grim was asked to elaborate on a particular family that has made an impression on her over the years. In response to this she began...

the first family that comes to mind is a family that I have known for

maybe ten years that are truly itinerant migrant families and they come up to a local camp, actually the camp at the orchard that we visited today [Hallobaugh Farms], and they come up each August and they leave each October-November, so they were a truly migrant family. Why I think about them is one because they have been back and forth every year except for this year, this is the first year they didn't come, which is probably why I am thinking about them more. But that family has three children. The family is comprised of a Mexican father and an Anglo mother and so the mother spoke English and Spanish and I always felt a little closer to her because we could have conversations in English and I didn't feel that it was hard to communicate. But I remember them because they came up each year and I had all three of their children. All three of their children are now in public schools, but the mother was in here a lot and I think we had a real personal contact outside of just a professional relationship we had a real personal relationship. And that is a family that I think of immediately.

HOW THE CENTER RELATES TO MIGRANT EDUCATION ON A NATIONAL LEVEL

Many of the same Issues and the Opportunity Center faces, are issues that migrant education in and of itself faces nationwide. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, "The average migrant student will attend 24 schools by the time he or she reaches fifth grade, according to recent studies. The probability of a migrant student earning a high school diploma is about 50-50". This shows that the issue of whether or not the kids are staying in the area or are seasonal is a current issue facing migrant education all over the country today.

The goals of Migrant Education are concurrent throughout the country as well. I think the Opportunity Center fits in well with the following goals. The *Greensboro News Record* reported "The goal of the Migrant Education Program is to create an interest in education and eliminate obstacles that might keep migrant children from excelling in the regular school curriculum".

It continued to report that "The federally funded program targets children and young adults between the ages of 3 and 21 who have moved from one school district to another during the

school year because of parents seeking work in the agricultural, fishing or food-processing fields."

The *Union Tribune* of San Diego, in an article titled "Parents try a new field of learning. Migrant education regionwide reaps rewards for kids," stated how many parents, mostly migrant workers, "meet monthly to learn how to become more involved in their children's education. The meetings are sponsored by the county Office of Education's migrant education program. Organizers find places for the parents to meet and speakers to give them information on topics including how to take part in their children's schools, helping with homework and keeping their children healthy.

The *Syracuse Herald American*, in an article titled "MIGRATING TOWARD BETTER LIVES STATE'S MIGRANT EDUCATION PROGRAM CHANGES WITH CHANGING TIMES", reports that "The migrant education program focuses on providing services such as in-home, in-school and weekend tutoring, homework help and training in study skills, to help

reinforce classroom instruction. Specialists in migrant education also provide support for parents, encouraging them to become involved in their children's education, teaching them about child development and sometimes tutoring them".

I think the above articles represent how the issues and the goals of the Opportunity Center are very similar to the issues and the goals of Migrant Education all over the country. Programs are doing the same types of things nationwide; supporting the same kinds of values, having

the same kind of activities, and emphasizing the same kinds of programs. They all promote education, family activities, teaching the parents, and socialization. They all of the same goals of making students productive members of society.

HOW THE OPPORTUNITY CENTER FITS INTO AMERICAN IDEOLOGY

All the services seem to be focussing on providing the Mexican community with opportunities for a better life, to get out of the one they are in (farm labor), to do something

different, or to move up within the farm labor industry. The programs do not place much emphasis, if any at all, on making farm labor and the kind of life that goes with it better, there is not much emphasis on helping the Mexican community to accept and be content with the life that they have. It is all geared toward giving them other opportunities that they don't have in their current life and having the opportunities so they can later chooser and/or find a way out. These are based on very "American" ideals of upward mobility.

In one way these types of programs are trying to tackle the system and American ideology by providing kids with opportunities and trying to get them ahead. But, at the same time they are promoting the system and the ideology of America by encouraging and supporting the values and

ideas of children getting better education, to get better jobs, to have a better way of life. They are encouraging the students to get these things in very American ways; working hard, seeking opportunities that are there, having desire, and socialization into the American culture.

The Washington Post reported, in the article "For children of the Fields, Education Is Elusive; Battling the Odds, Program Seeks to Provide Classes, Continuity for Young Migrants", that in relation to migrant children, "their lives represent a grim counterpoint to the American dream." This article represents how the the problems the Mexcians face in America are put into context through the idea of the American Dream.

According to the *Buffalo News*, "The reality for many workers is that the kinds of jobs they're able to get are not going to allow them to grow and achieve the American Dream". This again represents how the problems and issues facing the Mexican migrants are put into

perspective and into context based on the American Dream.

The Plain Dealer, out of Cleveland, Ohio reported that a state official said that "Education programs for the children of migrant farm workers are helping them leave the fields for college as they improve their lives". This article represents how the people and programs that are out to help the migrants are encouraging the American way of life and the ideology behind it.

In relation to the American Dream Maritza Gomez, first generation American of Cuban descent, stated in the *Greensboro News Record*, "I am grateful for all the opportunities available to one in this country. No matter where you come from, the opportunities are there. You just have to have the 'want to' and desire to do what it takes to make the most of them". This represents the Hispanic community's awareness of American ideals and their self-encouragement to live that way and achieve a better life that way.

In relation to the Hispanic community *The Salt Lake Tribune* backed that up when, in an article titled "American Dream Still Favors certain Races." They reported that the National Council of Economic Advisers "found that whites and Asians experience advantages in education, economic status and health over blacks, Latinos, and American Indians". The council also reported that "the economic status of Latinos has fallen during the past 25 years." The article continues to report that, as a way of improving this for the Hispanic community, the board, among other things, "proposed to enhance early childhood training and strengthen teacher

preparation and equity". They also proposed to "examine income inequality, use the current economic prosperity to provide job training, and increase the minimum wage.@ I think this again is representative of how the people trying to help the Mexican community are very aware of the

problems that the community faces, and how it is related to the American System and Set Up (ideology), at the same time, the way they try to help is by encouraging the Mexican community to buy into the American system and ideology, and to achieve those goals through American values.

CONCLUSION

I think the Opportunity Center is in fact a great social service provider. It was developed out of necessity, and then it evolved out of the desire to help the migrant communities and to give them

something. I think it is very representative of migrant education on a national level because it represents the same goals, and ways of achieving those goals, as other Migrant Education Programs across the country do. But I think it has been shown that the Center, in congruence with other Migrant Education Programs nationwide, does in fact try to help the community and fight the problems they face, through encouraging the American ideology by encouraging and supporting the ideas and values of the importance of getting ahead, and they encourage the American values of getting there.