

# Transformative Education:

## Migrant Farm Worker Outreach and Education Program

Deborah Des Jardins, English Language Institute (ELI) & Mabel Rodriguez, Residential College

### Background

The Migrant Farm Worker Outreach and Education Program, which was formed in 2002, grew out of two separate programs: the English Language Institute ESL program offered English lessons to adult men at camps in Lenawee County, Michigan, and the Residential College Spanish Outreach Program provided information on health issues, pesticide safety training, and interpreting for medical clinics to those same camps. In this program, students have an opportunity to enhance their understanding of the migrant farm worker community through direct interaction with individual workers and the community agencies that serve them. The current program demonstrates how integrative learning can have a long-term impact on students and the communities with whom they interact. The combination of hands-on experience, academic understanding and critical reflection can be transformative for many students.

Several underlying principles have guided the design of the program's courses. First, students who provide community service should understand the history and socio-economic background of the community with whom they are engaging and students need to have the skills necessary to successfully teach at the camps. Equally important, students develop the ability to think critically about the issues confronting the community. In other words, the needs of the community are of the utmost importance in this program.

*Through the practice of cultural exchange, I recognized and felt my positionality in the world in which differences are impacted by racism, classism, sexism, youth oppression, and linguistic discrimination (among manifestations of oppression). I thought I had known enough because of my own experiences as a first-generation Asian/Korean-American in a working class family. I was wrong and proven wrong in such a way through the Program...In other words, I was impacted by the program through a change of mind.*  
- Eun Lee, 2011



*The Migrant Outreach course opened my eyes to the realities that Latino immigrants face in the U.S. I would not be doing the work I do today if it wasn't for this course. Seeing the injustices within our immigrant system and the treatment of the workers at the camps, were what led me to decide to dedicate my career to advocating against those injustices, and creating larger systemic change in our communities.*  
- Becca Teizak, 2007

### Courses

One of the hallmarks of the current program is its uniquely designed two-course sequence, with the first course preparing students for the subsequent fieldwork component. In Principles and Practices of Teaching ESL in Migrant Communities, students gain a critical understanding of the systemic issues facing the migrant farm worker community. The course focuses on understanding and contextualizing the plight of migrant farm workers through academic discussion of historical, political and socioeconomic factors. In the latter part of the course, students learn ESL teaching techniques and practice teach in preparation for the summer course. In the practicum course, Migrant Community Outreach and ESL Teaching Practicum, students plan and teach English to adults and work with children on literacy and crafts at migrant camps in Southeastern Michigan. What makes this course different from other teaching experiences? For one thing, lessons are not taught in a classroom, but rather at a picnic table or on a grassy area of the camp. Also, lessons may have to be interrupted by inclement weather or social service agency programs. What's more, the U-M student teachers must recruit their own students to the lessons, many of whom will have been working in the fields for over twelve hours. Through this experience, students learn to confront unfamiliar communities and situations with flexibility, humility and a positive attitude, all of which are valuable life skills.

### Interactive Teaching Techniques

- Interactive teaching techniques are used to build a deeper understanding of the various issues facing the migrant community and to foster intercultural awareness and sensitivity. Examples of techniques used:
- Visualization of the US agricultural system through drawings, mobiles and games to describe the actors in the system.
- Games and role-play simulations are used to personalize the types of challenges that migrant farm workers face. For instance, students play a board game where the objective is to get into college; they encounter numerous obstacles along the way.
- Practice teaching lessons in a foreign language highlight how their own students might feel and to provide insights into teaching ESL to beginning level students.



Apple Tree Cross-Pollination



*The Migrant Outreach course did not simply impact my life. It changed it profoundly... Since completing the Migrant Outreach course, I have provided in-class support services to kindergarten and elementary school-aged children of migrant workers in southeast Michigan, taught ESL to undocumented and unaccompanied minor refugees living with foster families in Detroit, and spent five years as an adult ESL instructor for the Los Angeles Unified School District, the second largest in the nation.*  
- Fannie Weinstein, 2009

