

LA ESCUELA, A documentary by Hannah Weyer

A WORKSHOP GUIDE FOR PRE-SERVICE
& IN-SERVICE TRAINING FOR TEACHERS

INTRODUCTION TO WORKSHOP:

The documentary, *La Escuela* (School), will be shown at the beginning of the workshop as a springboard for discussion. The documentary follows Liliana (14 years old) and Elizabeth (23 years old) who are two of the Luis family daughters as they make their way in 21st century America. For Liliana, who begins her freshman year in high school, this means dealing with the harsh demands of work in the fields, constant travel and endlessly changing schools, classes and friends as she migrates with her farmworker family between California, Texas and Mexico. For Elizabeth, a limited education and the struggle to secure citizenship for her husband combine to create an uncertain economic outlook. In this compassionate portrait, *La Escuela* tells the story of one Mexican-American family's drive towards a better future.

It is a given that teachers, principals, and counselors work hard and do their best to teach and care for the students that enter their lives. For educators who have their slates full with their own very real daily tasks, it is also a given that many cannot know what it is like to wear the shoes of the teenagers that sit before them.

WORKSHOP GOAL:

Because the film is depicted from Liliana's point of view, the story attempts to place the viewer in the shoes of a teenager and show life as it is seen through her eyes. From this perspective, the first purpose of this workshop is to help educators learn more about life -- both in and outside of the classroom -- for students who migrate. The second goal of the workshop is to help educators find empathy for migrant students and a broader awareness of the emotional cost of this life style. And finally, the film addresses the cycle of economic need that drives migrant families out onto the road each year in search of work and the effect of that need on the ability of the younger generation to master an education.

PRE-SCREENING QUESTIONS/POINTS:

(As you watch the film, pay attention to depictions of values as they relate to work, family and education.

(Take note of Liliana's experience as she and her family move from one state to the next. Focus on her emotional experience as it relates to re-enrolling in school, home life and the move itself.

(Also take note of Elizabeth's reflections on her high school experience as they relate to her current economic needs and job opportunities.

(Think about these moments as they relate to the students that you teach.

POST-SCREENING DISCUSSION: QUESTIONS/POINTS
(TO BE DISCUSSED BROADLY AS A GROUP)

As educators, what did you learn from the film about what life is like for migrant students that you didn't already know?

What were some key moments in the sequence that reveal Liliana's emotional experience and the way in which she deals with re-enrollment?

What happened to Elizabeth and her older sister's education when their family needed them to work? What kind of modeling did they have, both in and outside of school? What kind of role models does Lili have?

Based on what you've seen, do you think Liliana's experience in high school will be a successful one?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION: BRAINSTORMING SOLUTIONS

Educators might want to break into two groups, each group tackling one of the above-mentioned goals of the workshop: 1) Economic need versus education and the catch-22 of the migrant cycle and 2) the emotional cost on Liliana and her teenage peers as it relates to the very real day to day toil of this lifestyle.

Group 1: Economic Need versus Education

How is the idea of financial interdependence -- everyone in the family pitching in to help with work -- depicted in the film and what impact does it have on the children in the family?

Can/do any migrant-related agencies offer financial assistance to families in order to keep students in school and out of the fields in the afternoons/evenings?

How can teachers learn more about migrant culture so that when they have teacher/parent conferences, teachers will have a sense of how to address problems, i.e., if a student seems tired in class or is not turning in homework -- the teacher might ask whether the student is working and how much. Often, a parent might not discuss this information freely.

What are ways that we can help teenagers become self-advocates? For example, is it Liliana's right as a human being to receive a complete and well-rounded education?

Group 1: BRAINSTORMING POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

What are possible solutions that Migrant Educators and Migrant Education Programs might embrace to ease some of Liliana's educational disruption and difficulties with school, especially as it relates to economic need and financial interdependence?

Some examples:

Creating student/peer mentoring; having migrant students who are juniors or seniors "tutor" or mentor migrants who are freshman. The mentors could help to

ease the transition from junior high-to-high school while expressing the importance of sticking with school, etc.

167 Youth Grant programs currently run out of the Dept of Labor offer stipends to migrant secondary youth while they go to school. For more info see: The Workforce Investment Act (WIA Youth Grant Program)

How can this information - re: grant programs/youth organizations - become accessible to teachers working with migrant students?

Others:

GROUP 2: Emotional cost and the toil of migration itself on the teenager

When Liliana and her family migrate between states, the viewer is given an intimate look at the details of "what it means to migrate" as well as a window into the home life of one family during these chaotic upheavals. To jump start a discussion, list some of the details of Liliana's migration experience.

What is Liliana's school experience on a social level? Who are her friends? Does she ever share her fears and anxieties with anyone? Think about Liliana and the girl from LA who didn't want to enroll in school because she was "embarrassed". How can schools lessen feelings of social discomfort and self-consciousness teenagers experience?

What did you notice about the counselor scene? Think about how the counselor inadvertently missed Liliana's interest in flags. How does one stay tuned in to the needs of students? What are ways that we can help teenagers become self-advocates?

How does mobility complicate the issues of placement, credit accrual and course alignment? What can be done for students like Liliana in terms of placement and the use of records from previous schools? How could electronic transfer of student information assist teachers with student placement and evaluation?

Group 2: BRAINSTORMING POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

What are possible solutions that Migrant Educators and Migrant Education Programs might embrace to ease some of Liliana's difficulties with school?

Some examples:

Creating peer mentoring; having migrant students who are juniors or seniors "tutor" or mentor migrants who are freshman. Mentors could ease the transition from junior high-to-high school while expressing the importance of sticking with school, etc. Senior mentors could be offered a "work-related" credit in school for learning how to become a mentor.

Project ESTRELLA Cyber Mentor Program where CAMP students mentor migrant secondary youth as they travel through e-mail messages and college encounters.

How can this information - re: grant programs/youth organizations - become accessible to teachers working with migrant students?

Others:

CLOSING DISCUSSION

After the designated brainstorming period, the workshop group re-joins and shares any new ideas. The workshop coordinator might collect a worksheet with

ideas and be in charge of disseminating positive points and ideas to the principal or other relevant migrant personnel.