

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 481 640

RC 024 217

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TITLE Casa de la Esperanza: A Case Study of Service Coordination at Work in Colorado.
PUB DATE 2004-00-00
NOTE 14p.; Chapter 6 in: Scholars in the Field: The Challenges of Migrant Education; see RC 024 211.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *After School Programs; Agency Cooperation; Community Programs; Culturally Relevant Education; *Educational Cooperation; Graduate Students; *Mentors; Migrant Housing; *Migrant Programs; Migrant Youth; Service Learning; *Youth Programs

ABSTRACT

This chapter describes how a federally funded farmworker housing facility in northern Colorado--Casa de la Esperanza--has changed the lives of migrant students and their families. The history of migrant workers in Colorado is described, as well as the struggle to construct a permanent farmworker housing facility. Casa was built in Boulder County, Colorado, after enforcement of regulations led to the closing of substandard migrant housing. In 1994 an after-school program for migrant youth at Casa was begun that aimed to help students with their homework, but also to build their confidence and expose them to the world and its opportunities. The coordinator of the after-school program and a professor from the University of Colorado School of Education collaborated to provide culturally relevant projects that addressed migrant students' social and academic needs. They also wanted to create cross-cultural experiences that would introduce the migrant youth and White middle-class university students to each other's worlds. University students acted as mentors for the Casa youth, providing tutoring, experiences with the Internet, art activities, and college preparatory activities. As part of a seminar on multicultural education, doctoral students participated in collaborative service-learning projects with an array of community agencies. The doctoral students worked on a variety of projects with Casa youth, focusing on tobacco prevention, leadership, literacy, English as a second language, college preparation, and creation of a mural for the community center. (SV)

Resource ID # 5941

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Coordination at Work in Colorado**

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CHAPTER 6



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Casa de la Esperanza: A Case Study of Service Coordination at Work in Colorado

BY MARÍA E. FRANQUIZ AND CARLOTA LOYA HERNÁNDEZ

I was very, very nervous my first day at school. I took all my classes in Spanish, except for my class with my ESL [English as a Second Language] teacher. When I finished the first half of the year, I passed to taking my classes in English. . . . Even though I think English is important and I need to dominate it before I can succeed, many people here in the United States forget their Spanish and know only English. They lose their roots. . . . I think that's wrong because we need to remember who we are and where we come from and be proud of our culture. —Mari Carmen López, *Voices from the Fields*

There continues to be little agreement on the best ways to help migrant students like Mari Carmen learn English, and gain the other knowledge they need to succeed in the United States, without losing their native languages and cultures. Yet, even in the midst of the many differences of opinion, it remains important that migrant educational settings in or outside of schools be caring, respectful places.¹ Re-

¹Geneva Gay, "Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching," *Journal of Teacher Education* 53, no. 2 (March/April 2002): 106-16.

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searchers have found that treating students' lives with *respeto* makes teaching more meaningful and easier to understand, increasing the potential for academic achievement.²

Quality of life also affects student achievement. Migrant students whose families struggle to make a living or find affordable housing face great challenges in the classroom. In recognition of their special needs, federally funded migrant education and housing assistance programs target these students, who increasingly work alongside their parents in our nation's fields.

Introduction of Our Collaboration

This chapter begins with a brief history of migrants in Colorado, their struggle to construct a permanent farmworker housing facility, and the personal histories of the authors and their collaboration to provide culturally responsive projects that address migrant students' social and academic needs. Finally, the chapter describes how the talented students at *Casa de la Esperanza* (House of Hope) and the University of Colorado School of Education combined forces to produce culturally responsive after-school education projects.

Historical Background

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the cultivation of sugar beets dominated farming in the South Platte Valley of Colorado, and the demand for farmworkers grew to exceed the local labor pool. The Great Western Sugar Company taught farmers the latest techniques, contracted with them to grow a specified number of acres within designated factory districts, and employed agents to recruit field laborers, particularly

²Guadalupe Valdés, *Con Respeto—Bridging the Distances Between Culturally Diverse Families and Schools: An Ethnographic Portrait* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); María Fránquiz, "It's about YOUth! Chicano High School Students Revisioning Their Academic Identity," in *The Best for Our Children: Critical Perspectives on Literacy for Latino Students*, ed. María de la Luz Reyes and John J. Halcón (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001), 213-28; Geneva Gay, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2000); Katherine H. Au and Alice J. Kawakami, "Cultural Congruence in Instruction," in *Preparing Teachers for Cultural Diversity*, ed. Joyce E. King, Eta R. Hollins, and Warren C. Hayman (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997); and Gloria Ladson-Billings, "Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy," *American Educational Research Journal* 32, no. 3 (fall 1995): 465-91.

German-speaking Russians from Nebraska; Japanese *solos*, or single men; and a large number of Spanish-speaking Americans.

During the 1910s, the violent Mexican revolution drove Mexicans to the rumored prosperity of Colorado's sugar beet industry. Over time, Mexican migrant families provided relatively stable labor, and the Great Western Sugar Company grew to prefer employing them over the other groups.³

During most of the twentieth century, migrant families lived in substandard housing provided by the beet farmers. Beginning in the 1990s, the U.S. Department of Labor stepped up enforcement of migrant housing standards, a move that had unintended outcomes. Migrant housing owners were charged \$1,000 for each violation of the standards (e.g., unsafe drinking water, torn window screens, non-working toilets). The fines prompted farmers to close or destroy their labor camps, and migrant families were forced to double- and triple-up in private housing.⁴ A 1992 editorial in a local Colorado newspaper confirmed the importance of migrants' work in Colorado and highlighted changes affecting their living conditions: "Longmont's agricultural economy historically has been dependent on the migrant worker. And with the demise of several family farms in Boulder County, which previously had housed workers, the needs of migrants became acute."⁵ The article emphasized that housing for migrant men, women, and children was a long-standing and now critical problem. The crisis alarmed local citizens and sparked a debate about the need for adequate migrant family housing.

A Controversial Housing Project

The review of a preliminary development and site plan for a 32-unit apartment complex for migrant families stirred great controversy. However, controversy was not new to Longmont, a town where for decades, public places had displayed racist signs: "No dogs or

³José Aguayo, "Los Betabeleros (The Beetworkers)," in *La Gente: Hispano History and Life in Colorado*, ed. Vincent C. de Baca (Denver: Colorado Historical Society, 1998), 105-20.

⁴Patrick Armijo, "Federal Fines Fuel Migrant Home Dearth," *Longmont Daily Times Call*, 5 January 1991, C1.

⁵"Editorial," *Daily Times Call*, 14 November 1992, 4A.

Mexicans allowed" and "We cater to the white trade only."⁶

Among the arguments against the migrant housing project were "migrant homes would detract from property values, boost the crime rate, and add to traffic problems." Other neighbors worried that the migrants would not fit in and would negatively affect local schools and the community: "Nearly all of its tenants will be transients, who won't care if their rooms or the nearby grounds are kept up." A resident of a mobile home park, in an openly racist letter, wrote "In fact, when more than two are together, they will sexually harass you."⁷

Hearings were held to receive public input on the development of the five-acre site. Housing authority representatives argued that migrants had always contributed to the local economy and required better housing for their families. State and federal funds would pay for the \$1.8 million facility, and tenants would pay rent based on a sliding fee scale that approximated a third of the family income. Plans also included a day-care center and an on-site manager employed by the housing authority to address resident and neighbor concerns.

Despite fervent community opposition, the city council unanimously approved the development plans for a resident housing facility for migrant families. The not-in-my-backyard posture of neighbors was organized into an appeal. After two years of negotiations, grant applications, public hearings, and scrutiny by state and federal agencies, a groundbreaking was held for *Casa de la Esperanza* in November 1992.⁸

Casa opened with fanfare the following year on September 16, the day that marks the independence of Mexico. Among speakers for the ribbon-cutting gala were a congressman, two county commissioners, the mayor, a councilman, and a Mexican poet who said, "September 16 is a great day for all people who love freedom."⁹ The first residents moved into *Casa* before the end of the year.

⁶Aguayo, "Los Betabeleros"; and Longmont Hispanic Study, *We, Too, Came to Stay: A History of the Longmont Hispanic Community* (Longmont, CO: Longmont Hispanic Study and El Comité, 1988).

⁷Monte Whaley, "Project Stirs Up Fear," *Daily Times Call*, 17 November 1991, 1A, 3A.

⁸David Halbrook, "'House of Hope' to Be Reality: Ground-Breaking Friday for Migrant Housing Complex," *Daily Times Call*, 12 November 1992, 2A.

⁹Gabrielle Johnston, "It Fits, It's Needed, It Belongs," *Daily Times Call*, 17 September 1993, A3.

A Young and Determined Coordinator of Education Services

In response to public concerns about the impact of migrant residents on the local schools and streets, the Boulder County Housing Authority hired an on-site manager for *Casa de la Esperanza*. They also hired a part-time coordinator of educational services, Carlota Loya Hernández. She ventured from the city of Boulder, where she had attended college and had worked as a paraprofessional in a middle school. Carlota compares the trip from Boulder to Longmont to crossing the borderlands between El Paso and Ciudad Juarez, Mexico; both were so close in miles but so far apart in culture. She embraced the challenges of the job because she, too, had worked the fields along with her farm-laboring parents.

Carlota was born in a *ranchito* in Chihuahua, Mexico, and emigrated to Center, Colorado. She was the eldest of seven children. Her family of nine all worked in the lettuce fields and the potato industry. The end of the summer season was always sad because her coworkers and friends would leave Center and return to their homes in Arizona, New Mexico, or Texas. Nonetheless, she loved school and immersed herself in studies, fully aware she would see her friends again the next summer.

While summers were bountiful with fresh fruits and vegetables, winters in Colorado were lean. In spite of her tenacity, Carlota remembers many winter months of feeling weak and unable to concentrate on schoolwork. These were times when the scarcity of food affected her school performance. She also remembers a Chicano boy harassing her, calling her "wetback," and saying she "smelled." In spite of the taunting, Carlota was determined to stay in school because she knew education was her ticket out of poverty. She graduated with a 3.87 GPA and was chosen Spud Bowl Queen, an honor that provided her with a one-year scholarship at Adams State College, 25 miles from her home in Center. Carlota completed requirements for her BA degree at the University of Northern Colorado in May 2003.

Carlota's childhood experiences in a farm-laboring family give her particular insight into how the children at *Casa de la Esperanza* feel. This background also helps her connect with migrant parents because she understands both their economic frustrations and their dreams for their children. Teachers, neighbors, and university students all realize that Carlota has an insider perspective and knows first-hand about the

distinct challenges migrant students face in adapting to new schools, new teachers, new classmates, and a new language.

With a donation from the Boulder County Board of Commissioners, the first after-school youth program at *Casa de la Esperanza* was implemented in summer 1994. Carlota recalled: "Here we can help the children with their homework, but also in building confidence and exposing them to the world and what it offers. Not many schools offer this because they're not bilingual." Carlotta disagreed with the school district, which claimed it was doing "a good job in trying to meet the needs of every student." Her central concern was that expectations were too low for migrant students. To make up for the limited migrant services in local public schools, the after-school program aimed to develop "confidence in who [migrant students] are and in their nationality, as well as helping them academically."¹⁰

From the earliest days of the after-school program, Carlota has advertised for volunteers to tutor in reading, science, math, karate, taekwon do, and *folklorico* dance. Carlota provides direct services to all *Casa* residents, not just students, by coordinating activities; recruiting volunteers; and collaborating with local agencies, youth programs, churches, the Mexican consulate in Denver, and the University of Colorado in Boulder.

In 1995, María Fránquiz became involved in Carlota's vision for better social and academic lives for the migrant students at *Casa*. As a military brat from Puerto Rico, María had experienced much mobility in her youth. Her native language was not seen as a resource by teachers in North Carolina, Texas, California, or Alaska, but she worked hard to overcome the linguistic, cultural, and economic barriers that marked her as different. In college, she had the distinct privilege of working with César Chávez and learned about the benefits of mentoring and coalition building to improve the social conditions of migrant children and their families. María's activist agenda for educators and Carlota's efforts to coordinate programs for migrant youth were an ideal match.

¹⁰Jenny McLoughlin, "Program Helps Migrant Labor Children to Cross a Bridge to Understanding," *Daily Times Call*, 12 February 1999, C1-C2.

Are Short-Term Mentors Valuable in Service Coordination Efforts?

María Fránquiz was new to Colorado when Carlota began working at *Casa de la Esperanza*. As a teacher and researcher, María was interested in learning about living conditions for Latino/Chicano/Mexicano youth and their families in the county where she was employed as a university professor. In the fall of 1995, she was invited to attend meetings of It's About YOUTH!, a group of at-risk middle and high school students. She became a member of the group's advisory board and began documenting weekly discussions of the youth and adult group facilitators. She arranged dialogues between the youth and her graduate students on ways to transform negative cultural stereotypes from both outside and inside the Mexican community. Through this work, María became acquainted with *Casa de la Esperanza* and sought to establish a collaborative relationship with Carlota and the migrant children.

As the education coordinator at *Casa* since 1995, Carlota has gone beyond her responsibilities for connecting families to needed health, occupational, recreational, and educational needs. She also strives to be a positive role model for the children at *Casa* and a strong mentor who inspires children to reach their highest educational goals. She does not try to do the work alone; rather, she connects children at *Casa* with as many ongoing mentoring relationships as possible. This is significant because quality mentoring improves the chances of low-income Mexican-origin students enrolling in an institution of higher education. For example, in a study of 50 Latino/Latina individuals who had attained advanced education degrees, Patricia Gándara found that mentors had helped many respondents overcome barriers to educational advancement.¹¹

Carlota and María began meeting regularly in spring 1996 to create opportunities for *Casa* children to interact with undergraduate and graduate students from the School of Education at the University of Colorado. These interactions took various forms. University mentors provided one-on-one tutoring and led children in search-and-evaluation activities on the Internet, reading and discussion of children's literature, leadership classes, art projects, trips to the university, and

¹¹Patricia Gándara, *Over the Ivy Walls: The Educational Mobility of Low-Income Chicanos* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

preparation classes for taking standardized tests such as the ACT. An elementary student stated eloquently why the *Casa* children were more comfortable with the University of Colorado mentors than with their classroom teachers: "I'm afraid to ask the teacher questions because then my classmates will think that I need help and then they can pick on me. . . . So I wait until lunch to ask for help, but then the teacher is always busy. I get a lot of help [at the *Casa* after-school program]."¹²

As part of a seminar on multicultural education, María required doctoral students to participate in a collaborative service-learning project with a diverse array of local community agencies, including *Casa*, Lutheran Refugee Services, Project YES (Youth Envisioning Social Change), It's About YOUTH!, the Asian Outreach Project of Boulder County Mental Health Services, and the Family Learning Center. The directors of these agencies visited the university campus during the first two weeks of the semester to make a pitch for volunteers. The doctoral students divided into small groups (preferably two or three students) and selected an agency with which to work. Within the groups, each student picked a separate facet of the agency and coordinated their service work with the agency director. At the end of the semester, the students presented their findings to the class and wrote reports to be included in a community project notebook. Agency directors evaluated the individual and collective contributions of the doctoral students and were invited to attend student presentations on the final day of class.

Fruits of Collaboration

The following time line indicates the community projects that the doctoral students completed with residents at *Casa*:

In 1996, doctoral students volunteered services to the *Casa* Youth Tobacco Education Project. Funded by the county and city, the project taught bilingual youth about the hazards of tobacco use. Weekly sessions in the community room included creating posters, watching videos, discussing tobacco-related issues, hearing presentations, learning questioning techniques, conducting interviews with peers and adults,

¹²McLoughlin, "Program Helps Migrant Labor Children," C2.

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1996	1997	1998	1999
Tobacco Prevention Survey & Production of booklet	Web page for Casa & Computer manual for lab	Library & Literacy Project	NABE conference presentation
ESL class		Leadership class	Evaluation of youth programs
		ESL class	Calculator & computer literacy
		Outreach grant proposal	ESL class
2000	2001	2002	
College preparation skills	Youth leadership class	Youth Photo Journal Project	
	Field trip to university		
Outreach grant proposal	Mural for community room		
English creative writing class			

reading literature, writing and translating responses, and writing about the hazards of tobacco for a bilingual booklet on the topic. Carlota assigned the doctoral students the responsibility of implementing the tobacco education project. She liked their self-directedness and felt they had been great role models in the production of the bilingual booklet entitled *El Libro de los Jóvenes del Proyecto de la Comunidad La Casa de la Esperanza: "Diga NO al Tabaco."*

The project has had a lasting impact. Former *Casa* resident Miguel Mósqueda currently attends Metro State College of Denver but finds time to work with the younger generation at *Casa*—helping with homework, supervising the computer lab, and reading to students from the booklet he helped write: "It's a way of paying back the help I got while I was there."¹³ Inspired by his own experience as a young

¹³Lauren Gullion, *Boulder County Housing Authority Newsletter 5* (August 2001): 4.

teenager, Miguel is trying to make mentoring a tradition at *Casa*.

In 1997, the doctoral students created a Web page for *Casa* and wrote a kid-friendly computer manual that was succinct enough for second-language learners of English to understand. The Web page assisted families interested in applying for housing and enabled house residents to voice their stories, often in their native language.

The following year, a larger group of doctoral students (six) set several goals for *Casa*. One subset of students secured funds to buy reference materials in English and Spanish for the families at *Casa* and purchased sets of culturally relevant books for the school-age children, particularly those in the early grades. Another subset of students offered ESL classes. Although these classes were aimed at adults, many school-age children also attended. One student worked closely with Carlota to initiate a leadership class for middle and high school children. This class has been extremely valuable because it provides older students with college preparation skills such as expository and creative writing. For the most part, the leadership class has been sustained continuously since 1998 and no longer depends solely on volunteers from the University of Colorado.

In 1998 and 2000, doctoral students wrote successful outreach grants funded by the University of Colorado's Continuing Education Program. These grants benefitted the residents of *Casa de la Esperanza* directly. For example, the funding enabled the *Casa* youth, some parents, Carlota, her technology assistant, and the doctoral students to present a paper at the annual conference of the National Association of Bilingual Education in Denver in January 1999. The funds also allowed the doctoral students to host *Casa* students for a full day on the University of Colorado campus and purchase bilingual materials and software for the after-school youth program.

In 2001, the doctoral students made a mural for the community center, where classes, fund-raisers, celebrations, and other activities are held. The doctoral students were hesitant at first, as reflected in one student's journal:

Yesterday was our first day with the Leadership group at *Casa*. It was a little strange—most of the kids only speak to each other in Spanish, and their English skills are mixed. As a non-Spanish speaker, I feel badly for not being able to understand or communicate in the language that these stu-

dents obviously feel most comfortable with. The kids agreed to do the mural project, but enthusiasm wasn't high. Hopefully, the class will start to feel more ownership once things get rolling.¹⁴

Another doctoral student wrote,

"I wasn't sure how much of the mural project is my idea and how much is the kids' actually wanting things—or Carlota? I'm not sure which is the real reason I'm here. . . . Anyway, I wanted to use my background in the arts."¹⁵

In spite of the uncertainty, university and *Casa* students embarked on a three-month journey that involved measuring, researching ideas, negotiating symbols, planning, sketching, drawing, mixing paints, and learning about one another. Late in the project, another doctoral student wrote the following:

The other day they were sketching their images of crosses, roses, the Virgin of Guadalupe, thorns, words. . . . I told them to bring music in if they wanted. Their eyes turned to stars, and Olga brought several CDs. So for the next hour we listened to beautiful Mexican folk music and then the occasional Britney Spears tune. It was so interesting. They're in the middle of their own making . . . they're creating their own culture.¹⁶

Upon completion of the mural, one of the artists living at *Casa* said,

Durante el proceso que se tomó para hacer este mural, yo me sentí muy afortunada de hacer algo para esta comunidad que nos ayudaron tanto, nos ayudaron tanto. Entonces regresarle algo a la comunidad o a Casa Esperanza era para mí un honor porque yo nunca pensé que yo podía devolverle algo a ellos. [During the making of the mural, I felt so fortunate in

¹⁴Anonymous student, "Community Project Notebook" (Boulder: University of Colorado, 2001).

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

being able to do something for the community that helped us so much, helped us so much. . . . In other words, to be able to return something to the community, *Casa Esperanza*, was an honor because I thought I would never be able to give something back to them.¹⁷

All the stakeholders—the mentors, *Casa* students, and authors of this chapter—shared a vision for the mural. Everyone accepted the premise that valuing cultural differences is possible only by acquiring *real knowledge* about a culture, knowledge that challenges one's own ways of seeing the world.¹⁸ Most of the challenges emerged during discussions of what to include in the mural. These social, cultural, and academic exchanges were as beneficial to the doctoral students as to the young residents at *Casa*, demonstrating that mentoring is a two-way street.

Conclusion

Service coordination and service learning suggest wonderful possibilities for teaching about culture in nontraditional settings while using traditional disciplines such as English, Spanish, or computer literacy and traditional skills such as writing and art. Although mainstream education may not address the needs of migrant students adequately, collaborative projects offer new opportunities for migrant youth to raise difficult issues. For example, one student eloquently stated, "The teachers, they are racist over there [local school], but [at *Casa*], I think we can recover something that we have lost."¹⁹ This student incorporated the "recovering" in the mural, demonstrating an awareness of the fragile and fragmentary state of migrant culture while portraying a vision of a new world. The student later pointed to the

¹⁷Anonymous *Casa* student, interview by authors, May 2001.

¹⁸Diane M. Hoffman, "Culture and Self in Multicultural Education: Reflections on Discourse, Text, and Practice," *American Educational Research Journal* 33, no. 3 (fall 1996): 545-69.

¹⁹Anonymous *Casa* student, interview by authors, May 2001.

²⁰*Ibid.*

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mural and added, "I drew this symbol because it represents my life, my new life."²⁰

One doctoral student noticed a form of this "new life" in the way *Casa* children greeted one another at the mural unveiling. They had a unique way of swiping and bumping their hands together, which meant "*Raza Unida*," a Spanish translation for *e pluribus unum*: In many, we are one. Not coincidentally, these were the words chosen as the title for the mural.

Gerardo López has shown that Mexican migrant farmworkers support their children's education by modeling the value of hard work and pointing out that migrant work is not adequately respected or compensated.²¹ Migrant children are encouraged to work harder in school so that their life choices are greater than those available to their parents. However, schools often perceive migrant families as uninvolved and uncaring about their children's education. Sometimes these pervasive attitudes erode efforts to improve the life choices of migrant youth. It is imperative to reeducate the education community about migrant students and their families—a transformation accomplished most effectively by *demonstrating* rather than *explaining* the importance of culturally relevant collaborative projects. The doctoral students at the University of Colorado and the migrant families at *Casa de la Esperanza* demonstrated to each other how collaborative effort does have positive impact and, in some cases, lifelong effects. Across years of collaboration, the culturally relevant projects completed at *Casa* were instrumental in reeducating all participants. The new understanding offers great promise or, in the words of one of *Casa's* young muralists, a "new life."

²¹Gerardo López, "The Value of Hard Work: Lessons on Parent Involvement from an (Im)migrant Household," *Harvard Educational Review* 71, no. 3 (fall 2001): 416-37.



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