

The Meaning of Roots: How a Migrant Farmworker Student Developed a Bilingual-Bicultural Identity Through Change

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Abstract

Thousands of children and teens labor as migrant farmworkers across the United States. These youngsters, many who are immigrants, face challenges in completing their education and breaking the cycle of agricultural work. Such barriers are influenced by geographic instability, poverty, and sociocultural marginalization. Beyond these factors, and the focus of this article, is the challenge of bilingual-bicultural identity negotiation experienced by young farmworkers in and out of the educational context. This question is explored through the case study of Manuel (a pseudonym), a teen farmworker in Florida. Manuel emigrated from Mexico at the age of 12, and is a speaker of Spanish, Otomi (an indigenous language), and English. Although he recently completed high school, he struggled to adjust to life in the U.S. and acquire English. Manuel provided interviews and autobiographical writing in 2008, when he was age 14 (grade 8), and again in 2012, when he was 18 (grade 11). His parents, also migrant farmworkers, contributed an interview in 2012. A qualitative, thematic analysis was applied to the data. Themes that emerged included: resistance and acceptance of personal and cultural-linguistic change, the need to *acostumbrarse* (get used to it) with respect to these changes, the desire to *salir adelante* (get ahead) and the pathways to do so (e.g., finish school, learn English), and Manuel's developing bilingualism and his shifting attitudes towards it. Overall, Manuel's story offers deep insights into the realities in which the bilingual-bicultural social identity of a migrant farmworker student develops and interacts in and out of school settings.

Keywords

Bilingualism, language and identity, migrant student, farmworker student; migrant farmworker

Era difícil porque me sentía muy raro vivir con mis padres. Yo ya estaba acostumbrado con mis dos abuelas, y mi tía, que cuidaban de mí. Me decía yo, "¿Qué hago aquí? Mi casa está en México." Pero yo no tengo casa en México. (It was difficult because I felt very strange living with my parents. I was already used to my two grandmothers, and my aunt, who took

care of me. I said to myself, "What am I doing here? My home is in Mexico." But I don't have a home in Mexico.) – Manuel (a pseudonym), age 18 (all translations by the author).

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Introduction

The United States (U.S.) depends on migrant farmworkers to harvest the food we eat every day. Despite cultural attitudes against child labor, hundreds of thousands of children and teens work in the fields alongside their parents to supplement the family income (Romano & O'Connor, 2011). Whether they work or not, children of migrant farmworker families face immense challenges in completing their education and breaking out of the cycle of agricultural work (Cranston-Gingras & Paul, 2008; Green, 2003; Romanowski, 2003; Vocke, 2007). These obstacles are impacted by the geographic instability of migration, situations of poverty, and sociocultural marginalization. Farmworker students are often immigrants who, along with their family/work responsibilities, must quickly acquire English and adapt to the cultural practices of U.S. schooling. The focus of this article is the negotiation of a bilingual-bicultural identity of Manuel, a teen farmworker in the southeastern U.S. who struggled to complete his education while adjusting to personal and cultural-linguistic change.

The only son in a Mexican family of four daughters, Manuel and his two older sisters were raised in Hidalgo by their grandmothers and aunts while their parents crossed the U.S. border in search of a better economic situation. Manuel's two younger sisters were born in the U.S. When he was 12 years old, Manuel's parents "lo mandaron a traer" (sent for him), and he entered grade 6 at a public middle school in Florida. At age 16, while still attending school, Manuel began to help his parents in the fields, picking tomatoes and other vegetables on weekends and during summer vacation in various locations in the U.S. southeast. Manuel struggled

academically, but managed to complete high school while also working in the fields.

As an immigrant (previously undocumented) and migrant farmworker, Manuel experienced continuous geographic, personal (familial), and cultural-linguistic changes throughout his adolescence. Coming to the U.S. meant that Manuel had to transition from being cared for by his grandmothers and aunts to living with his parents for the first time that he could remember. Beyond this, to meet academic demands, he had to learn an additional language (English) and participate in sociocultural and educational practices that differed from his previous experiences. Through a qualitative analysis of Manuel's autobiographical writing and interviews conducted with him and his parents, this case study examines Manuel's dynamic negotiation of a bilingual-bicultural sense of self in this, ever-changing context.

The Context: Migrant Farmworkers in the U.S. and Florida

It is difficult to determine an exact number of migrant farmworkers in the U.S., as many are undocumented and may elect not to participate in official surveys. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (2013) reported that, in 2012, there were slightly over one million agricultural workers in the country. However, the non-profit organization, Migrant Health Promotion, indicated a much higher number: between three and five million (2013). Among these, Romano and O'Connor (2011) suggested that over 400,000 are children. Additionally, it is estimated that 68% of farmworkers in the U.S. are from Mexico (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2013).

Agricultural workers are critical to the economy of the state of Florida, where Manuel and his family spend most of the year. After

California, Florida has the largest number of farmworkers, and south Florida ranks first in the country for agricultural employment in non-metropolitan areas (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). With a long growing season, there is work in the fields for Florida farmworkers from September to May. The state provides 75% of the oranges (State of Florida.com, 2000-2012) and up to 90% of the tomatoes (Estabrook, 2009) consumed in the U.S. Indeed, the country's "Tomato Capital" is the town of Immokalee, Florida, where more than 30,000 farmworkers arrive annually to support this industry (Rios, 2011).

While government documentation reports the average annual farmworker salary as approximately \$20,000 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013; U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2013), Estabrook (2011) indicated that the annual earnings of a tomato picker in Immokalee were just \$9,700 when he conducted his research. Indeed, for decades, tomato pickers earned approximately \$.50 per 30-pound bucket of tomatoes picked. Currently, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (2014) is reporting significant improvements for Florida tomato pickers, thanks to this organization's successful Fair Food Program. Now, 14 major corporations, including several fast food companies, food service industries, and Walmart, have committed to a wage increase, a code of conduct in the fields, farmworker education sessions on labor rights, a complaint resolution mechanism, and auditing.

In spite of important steps forward with regard to wages and worker rights in Florida's tomato fields, migrant farmworkers in general continue to experience conditions of poverty and isolation. They frequently spend time living apart from their families, and children may support their parents' efforts in the fields. Often not knowing the dominant language, farmworkers may be unaware of their rights

and subject to workplace abuse compounded by financial desperation (Estabrook, 2011; Holmes, 2013). Migrant farmworkers also experience poor health, having increased rates of many chronic and acute conditions including, among others, malnutrition, diabetes, hypertension, dental problems, headaches, heat stroke, tuberculosis, urinary tract infections, and skin and pulmonary problems due to pesticide exposure (Holmes, 2013). All of these conditions, along with the constant stress of housing and income insecurity, cause distinct educational challenges for children of migrant farmworker families.

The Education of Migrant Farmworker Children

Due to their vulnerable status and social marginalization, the children of migrant farmworker families have been called "invisible children" in the context of schooling (National Commission on Migrant Education, 1992). Public schools in the state of Florida serve more than 25,000 children of farmworker families, the third largest number in the country, after California and Texas (Florida Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2011). The majority of these children are from Mexico, and many are speakers of one of Mexico's 68 indigenous languages (Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indigenas, 2014). Thus, when they arrive in the U.S., these students may be monolingual in an indigenous language or bilingual in their home language and Spanish. In either case, most children of migrant farmworker families speak a home language(s) that differs from than the dominant language of schooling, English, which remains the primary language of instruction and the language of power in the U.S. (Nieto, 2010; Paris, 2010).

The Challenge of Finishing School

Nearly two decades ago, Martinez and Cranston-Gingras (1996) reported that students of farmworker families had the highest school abandonment rate of any other group. In order to identify their motives, these researchers surveyed 345 teen farmworkers who had left school. The most commonly cited reason was to work in the fields to help their families (36%), followed by a loss of interest in school (13%).

The most current data on migrant student graduation rates from the U.S. Department of Education (2012) comes from the 2009-2010 academic year. According to this resource, migrant student school completion rates vary greatly from state to state (e.g., 25% in Maryland vs. 86% in Oregon). For the state of Florida, it is reported that 64% of migrant students graduated high school in four years with a regular diploma, up 4% from the previous year. Apparently, some states are better than others at harnessing the resources and resilience of migrant students.

Resilience and Perseverance

Notwithstanding their challenges, and temptation for school abandonment, some farmworker students achieve school success and enter post-secondary education. Several studies have focused on the characteristics of these resilient youth.

For example, Cranston-Gingras (2003) described the High School Equivalency Program (HEP) for migrant farmworker students at the University of South Florida. This program offered individualized pathways for migrant teens that have previously abandoned school, some as early as sixth grade (average grade of school withdrawal was grade 9), to earn the General Education Diploma (GED). In addition to academic preparation with the GED curriculum, students attending HEP could participate in

an individualized learning resource program, English language instruction (if necessary), the sociocultural activities of the university, opportunities for service learning, and career counseling/vocational training. At the time of publication, 70% of HEP students were successfully earning the GED, all with immediate, post-completion employment and/or enrollment in post-secondary education. Outcomes of this program attest to the unique educational needs of many migrant farmworker teens, as well as their ability to succeed academically when these needs are met and supported.

McHatton, Zalaquett, and Cranston-Gingras (2006) explored, also with surveys, the characteristics of 57 students who participated in a program especially for migrant farmworker students attending university. In general, the participants reflected characteristics of self-sufficiency, independence, perseverance, and resilience. The majority (78%) responded that their family had been a key motivating factor; that is, their parents had emphasized the importance of education and the desire that their children would have a better life than their own. Finally, the results suggested the importance of the school community in demonstrating cultural-linguistic competence in order to support students of diverse backgrounds.

In another qualitative study, Romanowski (2003) confirmed the fundamental role of schools in recognizing and serving the unique needs of students from farmworker families. Through observations and interviews with teachers, coordinators, and students participating in a summer workshop for migrant students in Ohio, this study identified various keys to creating a supportive school climate for farmworker students. These included: critical self-reflection on the part of teachers to identify

prejudices and challenge stereotypes; understanding of cultural differences that may exist between migrant families and the dominant school culture; a safe and positive school environment; and the use of a culturally relevant and consistent curriculum.

These studies demonstrate that, although migrant farmworker students may move from place to place, the schools they attend have the opportunity to create supportive environments in which culturally competent staff and well-structured curricula have a positive impact on their future. Indeed, it is in the school context where farmworker students acquire English and develop social identities as bilingual-bicultural individuals. However, it is important to note that the research cited was conducted at the program level and not at an individual level. Delving more deeply into the story of a migrant farmworker student like Manuel, through case study, has the potential to contribute additional insights into the challenges and resources, as well as the process of identity development, of these students.

Bilingual-Bicultural Identities and In-Between Spaces

Immigrants—*notwithstanding where they come from or where they go to—often experience “identity vulnerability or insecurity”* (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 244) as they navigate an unfamiliar cultural environment. Additionally, these individuals may feel tension as they find themselves socially positioned by others differently from how they see themselves, based on societal power structures involving gender, class, race, and ethnicity (Blackledge & Pavlenko). Thus, in their new place of residence, immigrants must not only acquire a new language, but also *de/re/construct* their social identities in new cultural-linguistic contexts. In this way, immigrants, as well as the second and third

generation children of immigrants, often negotiate hybrid identities that integrate their home culture and language with newly acquired cultural-linguistic practices (Giampapa, 2001). For immigrant children and children of immigrants, this identity negotiation usually occurs in the context of school.

Qualitative methodologies have been employed to explore identity negotiation of immigrant students in various contexts. For example, Sarroub (2002, 2005) investigated, through ethnography, the dual identities of female, Yemeni, Muslim students attending a public high school in Michigan. On a daily basis, these students sought to balance their roles as “good Muslim women” (2005, p. 1) and typical U.S. students in a strategic negotiation of often-divergent home and school worlds. Sarroub used the term, “in-betweenness” (2002, p. 130), to describe the girls’ ever-shifting discourses and sociocultural practices in terms of language (Arabic-English), culture, ethnicity, and identity across home and school contexts.

Giampapa (2001) also used ethnography to explore the hybrid identities, as expressed through linguistic practices, of second and third generation Italian-Canadians (aged 19-24) studying Italian at university. This author employed the phrase, “lean on” (p. 297; e.g., to lean on different elements of identity) to express how the informants strategically used language to highlight different aspects of their dual identities in various, transnational contexts (both in Canada and on a study trip to Italy). Findings suggest the powerful role of language in identity negotiation for second and third generation youth. Giampapa concluded: “My research highlights the fact that identity performances are never fixed but a hybrid, complex, multicultural and multilingual expression of the participants’ desires” (p. 308).

Also focusing on the role of language in identity negotiation, Iannacci (2008) used ethnography to consider the code-switching practices of bilingual students attending kindergarten and grade 1 at a public school in Canada. The focus was not so much on the children's linguistic behaviors, but on the influence of context and power relations influencing why and how code switching occurs. Iannacci (2008) framed the study with the concept of liminality, that is, the "sense of living between two languages and cultures" (p. 103) that culturally and linguistically diverse students experience in the context of schooling. Iannacci found that the students used code switching in dealing with their liminality and the linguistic demands of their monolingual classroom, as well as in "capitalizing on their knowledge of official and unofficial discourses, and as such as a hybrid literacy practice (blending of primary and dominant languages and registers) that helped them negotiate socialization in the context of their classrooms" (p. 113).

For Iannacci (2008), the acceptance of code switching in diverse classrooms has the potential to create a third space, a term used by Bhabha (1994) to describe cultures in contact. Bhabha's notion of a hybrid "Third Space" (p. 36) challenges our understanding of culture as a homogenous, unifying force and source of historical collective identity. For Bhabha, it is in the "in-between spaces" (p. 1) that new identities and, indeed, new societies, are formed. In the "Third Space," cultures in contact push the boundaries to reconstruct something that is not the sum of two cultures, but a completely new, third culture.

The idea of a third culture is also essential to Anzaldúa's (1999) work, *Borderlands/La Frontera*. This author suggested that the U.S.-Mexican border represents a "third country" (p. 25): a border culture, where people grow up between two

cultures. People living in the literal and metaphorical borderlands may discover that:

It's not a comfortable territory to live in, this place of contradictions. Hatred, anger and exploitation are the prominent features of this landscape. . . Living on borders and in margins, keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an *alien* element. (Anzaldúa, 1999, preface).

This concept of a third space identity serves as a framework for the case study of Manuel. As a Mexican immigrant and bilingual speaker of Spanish, Otomi, and emerging English, Manuel found himself struggling to *acostumbrarse* (get used to) his new life in Florida, where his family structure had changed and schooling was conducted in English and in the context of new and different sociocultural expectations. As a migrant farmworker, Manuel also had to negotiate a balance between work and school identities to support the financial needs of his family and meet his parents' and his own expectations to *salir adelante* (get ahead).

Methods

The present inquiry is a case study of Manuel, a teen migrant farmworker in the southeastern U.S. Stake (1995) identified the key purpose of a case study as, "We would like to hear their stories" (p. 1). Seidman (2013) followed up with, "Most simply put, stories are a way of knowing" (p. 7). This is certainly the motivation for working with Manuel, as his story has the potential to contribute to our understanding of the lives of migrant

farmworker students, a little studied group with unique educational needs.

Researcher self-disclosure

I am a bilingual, biliterate researcher of bilingualism, especially the writing of adolescent English learners. I met Manuel in this context, but did not know at the time that he was from a migrant farmworker family. From 2010-2013, I was involved in supporting Florida farmworkers through community service and advocacy. I have witnessed first-hand the hardships of some of these families, and it is important to me to share Manuel's story as a means of promoting understanding and support for farmworker students. I conducted all interviews with Manuel and his parents in Spanish, and transcribed them myself, seeking assistance/clarification from native speakers from Mexico when needed.

Encounters

I met Manuel in 2008, when he was age 14 and attending grade 8 at a public middle school on the west coast of Florida. At that time, he was enrolled in the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program and, as part of this class, participated in a research project on the bilingual, narrative and expository writing of English learners in middle school (Danzak, 2011a, 2011b). As one of six focal participants, Manuel also contributed an interview about his language and literacy learning experiences.

Four years later (2012), I decided to follow-up with the focal participants of the bilingual writing study. It was a challenge to find Manuel because he had left the district immediately after grade 8. However, thanks to his middle school ESOL teacher and social media, I discovered that Manuel had spent the last four years moving around the state, attending high school while simultaneously picking tomatoes and other vegetables as a

migrant farmworker. When I met with him in southeast Florida for a second interview, Manuel was 18 years old, attending grade 11 at a public high school, and still enrolled in an ESOL program.

Data

Data for Manuel's case study came from interactions in 2008, when he was age 12 in grade 8 and in 2012, when he was age 14 in grade 11. Collecting both interviews and writing samples from Manuel at two distinct points in time, as well as an interview of his parents in 2012, allowed for data triangulation, strengthening the validity and, therefore, reliability, of the qualitative research (Golafshani, 2003).

Interviews

Based on the preferences of Manuel and his parents, all interviews were conducted in Spanish. The interviews were recorded and transcribed immediately for analysis.

In 2008, as part of the bilingual writing study, Manuel contributed a semi-structured interview (Bernard, 2006), during ESOL class time. A pre-determined protocol (used with all participants) guided this interview; however, the structure was flexible and allowed for additional questions and conversation. In the 2008 interview, Manuel briefly described his family, summarized his immigration, and made general comparisons between his schooling in Mexico and the U.S. He also talked about his usage patterns of Spanish, Otomi, and English, and described how he felt learning English as an additional language at school. Manuel's 2008 interview lasted approximately 12 minutes and produced four pages of single spaced text.

In 2012, Manuel provided a much more extensive, unstructured interview; I had a general plan in mind, but relinquished control to let Manuel express himself on his terms

(Bernard, 2006). At this time, Manuel and I met at a restaurant and talked for 1 hour 25 minutes. In this interview, Manuel was able to provide rich detail about his family, his childhood in Mexico, his transition in the U.S., his languages, and his experiences at school and as a migrant farmworker. The 2012 interview resulted in a transcript of 30 single-spaced pages.

In 2012, after meeting with Manuel, I also conducted an unstructured interview with his parents in which we conversed about Manuel's experiences (as reported by him), their feelings about his transitions, and their expectations and hopes for him. I spoke to his mother and father simultaneously by phone (on speaker), for 23 minutes, while they were driving from one work location to another. The resulting transcript was 7.5, single-spaced pages.

Writing

As a participant in the 2008 bilingual writing project, Manuel—like the other participants—completed a questionnaire on his language experience and use, and produced two narrative and two expository autobiographical texts, each in English and Spanish (total of eight texts), and 10 journal entries in the language of his choice (always Spanish). (See Appendix for a list of autobiographical writing topics). Like the other participants, Manuel revised and compiled all of these texts, with selected illustrations, into a final, Bilingual Autobiography that was published as a book and displayed at a culminating community event (for details on Manuel's bilingual writing in 2008, see Danzak, 2011b). Manuel was invited to produce four more autobiographical texts in 2012 (two narrative, two expository,

each in English and Spanish). However, he opted not to complete this task. Instead, he granted permission for me to include our Facebook messages as writing samples from 2012.

Analysis

All data (in the form of Word documents) were uploaded in to Dedoose (2013), an online, qualitative data analysis software. A thematic analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Grbich, 2007) was applied to identify and code themes and subthemes in the data. For Corbin and Strauss (2008), themes are categories that “represent relevant phenomena and enable the analyst to reduce and combine data” (p. 159). Creswell (2013) described the process of classification, in which data are organized into a few or several general themes, “broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea” (p. 186).

As the themes and subthemes were identified and coded in the interviews and written texts, themes and excerpts were organized into tables and data displays (Miles & Huberman, 1994) using Inspiration 8 (2006) concept-mapping software. This process determined relationships among the themes and subthemes and illustrated changes in Manuel (e.g., feelings, goals, identities) from 2008 to 2012.

Findings

Thirty-seven themes and subthemes were identified and coded in Manuel's data (all interviews and writing samples across 2008 and 2012). These themes are interrelated, as illustrated by the data display (concept map) presented in Figure 1, which includes most codes.

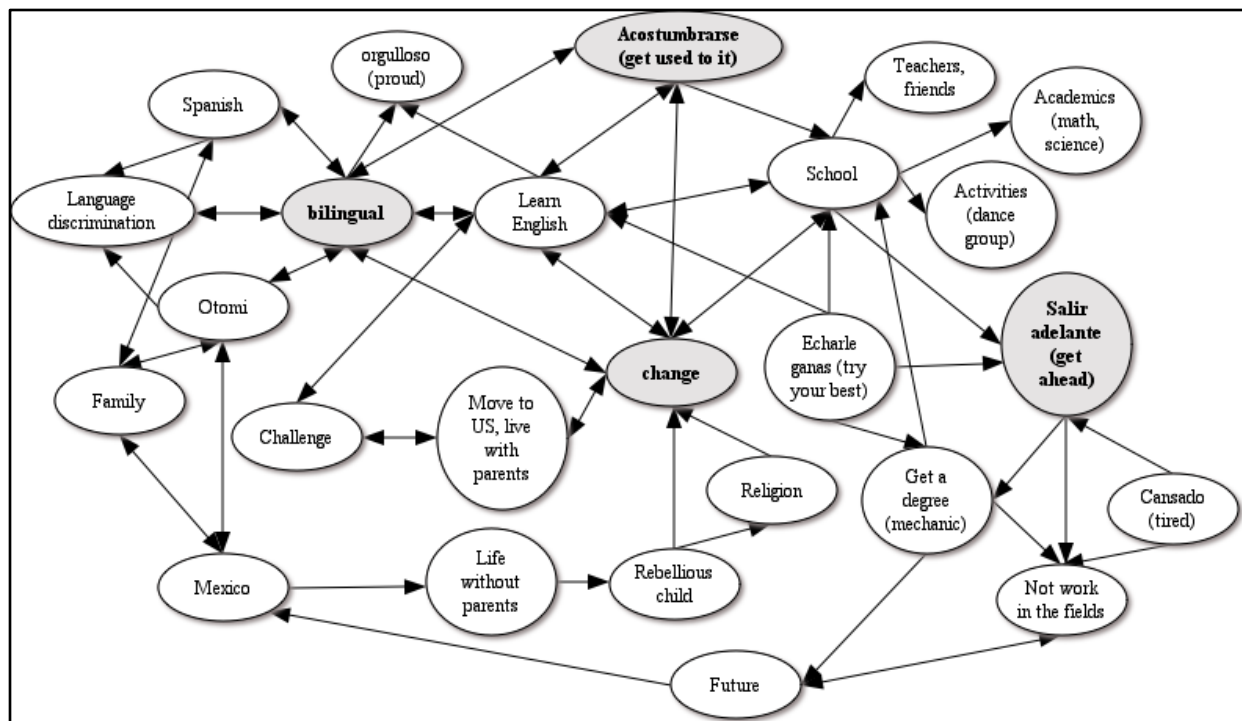


Figure 1. Concept Map of Manuel's Story. Graphic representation showing interrelationships of themes and subthemes.

Keeping in mind the conceptual framework of hybrid/third-space identities, Manuel's story and the emergence of his bilingual-bicultural identity can be told from the starting point of four major themes (identified in Figure 1 by gray shading): change, *acostumbrarse* (get used to it), *salir adelante* (get ahead), and bilingualism. All other themes, including some that played important roles in the analysis (e.g., family, school, and learning English), are connected to the major four and will be explained within them. Note that, for the purposes of this article, interview quotes were translated directly into English. However, excerpts from Manuel's writing are presented in the original Spanish, including errors, and translations are provided.

Change

As the child of migrant farmworker parents, instability and change have been constants in

Manuel's life. His parents migrated to the U.S. before he was born, when his mother was just a teenager. She narrated,

Well, I came at 14 years old to the U.S.; since then we have been working, well, in agriculture. . . . But we can't get used to it, though. I don't know, lately, we need to find a little work, and we leave the city and return to the fields again. And that's how we go. But my whole life has been in the fields. (Parent interview, Manuel's mother, 2012).

Manuel's two older sisters and he were born in Mexico, due to their father's "celos" (pride). Manuel explained,

Ah, my dad was a very proud person, very proud. He criticized the Chicanos [people of Mexican origin born in the U.S.], said they were lazy. He didn't want us to be like that. So, it was his pride that pushed him. My mom got pregnant here [in the U.S.]. She got

pregnant here, and they went leave us in Mexico. ... The two younger [sisters] were born here. Later my dad realized that it was better for us to be born here. But, I'm telling you, it was his pride that took us to the other side. (Manuel's interview, 2012).

After he was born, Manuel's parents, desperate for work, returned to the U.S., leaving him and his two older sisters in the care of their grandmothers and aunts. His mother described,

The hardest part, this was when we tried to bring them, well, we went and the kids, we left them in Mexico. . . with relatives, my mom and my sister, we left them in charge and this was the hardest, being separated from our children. I said, "I'm going to look for something for you to eat, for a better life", but at the same time, we were separated from them. When we went back [to Mexico] they were already all grown up. (Parent interview, Manuel's mother, 2012)

Thus, Manuel attended grades kindergarten through six (primary school) in Mexico. He describes himself during those years as a "street kid":

Honestly, I have changed so much. My family has changed so much. ... When I was small, I was a bum, a man—a boy of the streets. I was almost never home, when I was in Mexico. My parents were here. They would go visit us, but it wasn't the same. So, I was more a street kid than a home kid. I lived with my grandma, my aunt. And I went wherever I wanted. My sisters stayed in one place, but, as a boy, I think, I was more rebellious. Honestly, I was a bad kid before. (Manuel's interview, 2012)

Understandably, Manuel did not reveal the experience of living apart from his parents

in 2008. In fact, he even softened/hid it, explaining in the interview that, when he was small, his mother helped him learn to read in Spanish: "My mom taught me to, she showed me the alphabet, the vowels" (Manuel's interview, 2008).

However, in line with his later self-identification as a street kid, Manuel's 2008 written autobiography mentioned that, in Mexico, he spent a lot of time outside playing soccer (all writing excerpts are reported verbatim):

Mi deporte favorito es el futbol porque es divertido. Esta actividad lo aprendi cuando tenia 7 años. ... Esta actividad lo practique con mis primos que estan en MÉXICO (My favorite sport is soccer because it is fun. I learned this activity when I was seven years old. I practiced this activity with my cousins who are in MEXICO).

Indeed, much of our conversation in 2012 involved looking back at what Manuel had expressed (or not expressed) in 2008. He explained, "Before, I was very, I was a very shy boy. I was afraid of everything" (Manuel's interview, 2012). Also reflecting on how he was during the time of the 2008 project, Manuel recognized, "I complained a lot. But, now with time, I see that we are put in different positions so that we learn more about life" (Manuel's interview, 2012). As a more mature, 18-year old, and after six years of living with his parents in the U.S., Manuel was able to summarize very insightfully the significance of change in his life:

Honestly, for me, I shouldn't change, I should continue to be the same as always. The only things to change are the bad things I have done and that's it. But, I will keep being who I am. ... Like I said, before I was a very demanding kid, very rebellious. In this I have changed a

little, and it has helped me. (Manuel's interview, 2012).

His father agreed, and suggested that religion may have helped Manuel mature out of his rebellious phase:

Well, religion influences a little too, I imagine, because it's also about this. This influences a lot. Through education more than anything because when children, let's assume, have a rebellious phase, sometimes the church helps, by giving them a bit of education, along with us as parents. You know, God. I think it seems that this has helped him a little to go inside [off the streets]. (Parent interview, Manuel's father, 2012).

***Acostumbrarse* (get used to it)**

A major turning point for Manuel was when, at age 12, his parents decided to bring him to the U.S. to join them and his two younger sisters. His elder sisters, older teens at the time, stayed in Mexico. Manuel explained,

They [his parents] say, "Before, everything was easier, when you guys were in Mexico" because, they say, it wasn't that they stopped loving us, but they could save more money. Because, they worked a little and they sent us money. It's not like the money here; from here to there [Mexico] the [value of the] money multiples, doubles. So, it was better. But, she [mom] said, "What good is it, sending them money, if I don't have them with me?" So she sent for us. (Manuel's interview, 2012).

Thus, Manuel, a self-proclaimed Mexican "street kid", suddenly found himself in an urban area on the west coast of Florida where he had to attend a U.S. school (grade 6), learn English, and live with his parents for the first time in his life. He remembers,

It was difficult because I felt very strange living with my parents. I was already used to my two grandmothers, and my aunt, who took care of me. I said to myself, "What am I doing here? My home is in Mexico." But I don't have a home in Mexico. (Manuel's interview, 2012).

When I met Manuel in 2008, two years after his arrival (age 14), it was clear that he was struggling to adjust (*acostumbrarse*) on multiple levels. He told me, "I have lived here for a few years. I can't get used to it here." When I asked, "Do you think at some point you will get used to it here?" he replied, "No, never. Because I feel that it is not my country" (Manuel's interview, 2008). This struggle was also reflected in his 2008 autobiographical writing:

Mi momento triste fue cuando vine a los ee.uu. Porque me dolio dejarmis abuelos, hermanas, tios. Con mis hermanas que me vine estaban felices pero yo no porque deje a todos mis familiares en méxico (My sad moment was when I came to the U.S. Because it hurt me to leave my grandparents, sisters, uncles. With my sisters when I came they were happy but not me because I left all my relatives in Mexico).

In his "Letter to a new student" text (English version), Manuel wrote, *maybe hi [he] can't get used to like me still can't get used to very good even though I have two years right here in the U.S.A.*

Both the content and structure of Manuel's grade 8 writing reflect his challenges in adjusting to the culture and acquiring English language and literacy. In his 2012 interview, Manuel and I revisited the idea of *acostumbrarse*, in terms of his immigration as well as his work as a migrant farmworker.

Reflecting on his 2008 responses, Manuel stated,

I remember. But, well, I think that I couldn't get used to it because I hadn't visited other places. Being able to visit others, I preferred [the west coast]. ... And, well, what I really didn't like about it was that we were very closed in ... we almost never went out. Because all we did was go to school, go home, go to school, go home. My mom was working at night, and my dad got home late from work. So we couldn't spend time together. In reality, as time goes by, I don't know, things change. I say, we are put in this [situation] for something, right? To learn. (Manuel's interview, 2012).

Fortunately, Manuel's relationship with his parents improved over time:

I see that with time I have changed a lot. I don't know, I see that now my life is better than before. . . . Now I feel that my family is closer than before, when my parents were here and we were there. They went to visit us, but it wasn't the same. I don't know, I didn't like it because, each time they went, they went to visit us for a time, and they came back and, I don't know, it was really crazy. But now, now that we are all together, we spend more time together. It is better. And my life changed because, now that we are more together, now, I'm not a street kid like I was before. (Manuel's interview, 2012).

Regarding his work in the fields, Manuel reported that, after almost three years of picking crops, "I am getting used to it now" (Manuel's interview, 2012). However, he also stated,

I'd say that the small ones [cherry/grape tomatoes are harder to pick] because it

takes longer like, if you are fast, you fill a bucket in 20 minutes, with the small ones. The big ones, in two, three minutes you fill it. So, but really, it's the same, because for the tomato, the big one, you have to be like this (crouching down), bent over all the time. And also the grape [tomato]: you sit, you squat, you kneel, but it's also tiring. It's tiring. It's all tiring. (Manuel's interview, 2012).

Overall, Manuel was more accepting of change and more comfortable in the U.S. in 2012; however, he still hoped to return to Mexico:

Maybe I didn't get used to it. I am getting used to it a little bit. I see now that it is different, but to stay here the rest of my life, no, I don't think so. But yes, I am getting used to it a little bit. (Manuel's interview, 2012).

Salir Adelante (get ahead)

Like most migrants, Manuel's parents came to the U.S. in search of work to provide for their families, and in hopes of better opportunities for their children's future. His father summarized, "[Manuel], I want him to get a career so he doesn't have to work in the fields like us" (Parent interview, Manuel's father, 2012). Completing high school was not easy for Manuel, especially considering his immigration to the U.S. at age 12, his struggles with change, geographic instability due to migration, and the challenge of learning academic English beginning in middle school. Manuel's father explained,

Thank God, he promised us that he was going to *salir adelante* and *echarle ganas* (try his best) in his studies and, well, really he is doing so-so. I can't tell you that he is doing well-well exactly, but since we have moved from one place

to another, it was not always the same school so he got a little bit behind. But now, thank God, during this period he has been going to only one school. (Parent interview, Manuel's father, 2012).

His mother agreed, "Well, I believe that, for me, I am proud of him that he has that mentality for his studies" (Parent interview, Manuel's mother, 2012).

Manuel's own opinion about his school challenges has evolved over time. In 2008, he stated that learning English was "very difficult," and later identified it as his greatest school challenge: "Because everything else, once I learned English, it started getting easier for me" (Manuel's interview, 2012). In 2012, attending high school, Manuel had greater concerns about science:

Before I was good at science, but now that I have gotten to chemistry, no, it's harder for me. . . . It's very difficult. Now I realize that science isn't as easy as it was before. So science has gotten a lot more complicated for me there. (Manuel's interview, 2012).

On the other hand, thanks to a tutor who changed his attitude, Manuel feels that he is improving in math:

A tutor said to me, "Do you realize, reading is harder than math?" And I said, "Why?" He told me, "Because with math, once you learn something... how to solve a problem, the others are the same". ... I started to like math a little more now. I don't say that I'm good at it, but I think that now it's a little bit easier. (Manuel's interview, 2012).

Regarding his hopes and plans for the future, Manuel had already assumed the *salir adelante* mentality in 2008, when he wrote in a journal entry: *Yo quisiera para mi futuro ir a México para trabajar en México. También*

planeo ayudar a mi pueblo para que sea mejor que los demás porque a mí nunca me gusta quedarme atrás (I would like for my future to go to Mexico and to work in Mexico. I also want to help my town to become better than the others because I never like to be left behind).

In 2012, when Manuel considered his future, he said,

Honestly I don't know if I am going to stay here [South Florida] or go with my parents to migrate there [North Carolina], but I want to stay here more because I want to get my career: my career as a mechanic. ... Whether they pay well or not it's because I like it. ... Engines are my passion. ... Yes, stay for a little while here and get my career going and then, afterwards, with time, at the right time, I do want to go to Mexico, maybe to live or at least to travel. (Manuel's interview, 2012).

Bilingualism

Manuel's journey can also be narrated as a tale of multiple languages. His family speaks Otomi, an indigenous language, and Spanish, the language of schooling and power in Mexico. In 2008, in Florida, Manuel was resistant to learn and use English, explaining, "I don't know, it's very difficult. Like, it's like as if I were being born again because it's another language" (Manuel's interview, 2008). At that time, Manuel was a speaker of Spanish and Otomi, and an emerging English learner. However, he did not consider himself to be bilingual (instead, monolingual in Spanish). He also suggested that he did not speak Otomi and understood it only "a little" (Manuel's interview, 2008). In 2012, when I asked him about Otomi, he explained, "I *knew* it. Yes, I use it, but only with my parents. ... My parents speak it, but only them. When they talk to me I understand it. I can't speak it, but I understand it" (Manuel's interview, 2012).

In both 2008 and 2012, Manuel's preferred language, for both speaking and writing, was Spanish: "I have it in my roots, because my family speaks Spanish, I speak it too" (Manuel's interview, 2012). Regarding his local community in 2012, Manuel stated, "It's full of Hispanics here. It's wonderful. ... English is almost never used here" (Manuel's interview, 2012). However, school was a bit different:

We have teachers that speak Spanish, but sometimes they don't speak Spanish; they don't want you to learn Spanish . . . but to learn more English. So, if they know that someone doesn't speak English, they say, "Try to speak more English so you learn." But when they see that someone really doesn't understand, they speak to you in Spanish. (Manuel's interview, 2012).

Although he is happy to use Spanish in diverse social contexts, as a Spanish speaker in the U.S., Manuel has experienced the pain of language discrimination. In 2008, he stated, "I have heard several people say that we are in America, that we shouldn't speak Spanish. I have realized that, some people say we shouldn't speak Spanish. This depresses me" (Manuel's interview, 2008). When we discussed language discrimination in 2012, he reflected,

Ah, well, I think that I will continue to feel it. Because, sometimes people, there are people who honestly want you to speak Spanish. But there are people that, I don't know, they criticize because they think we are talking bad about them. Like before, I criticized them because I thought they were saying bad things about me [in English]. But now I realize that, it's better to be, like you say, it's better to

be bilingual. (Manuel's interview, 2012).

Manuel recognized that learning English was a tremendous challenge, and suggested that he learned the most when he was forced to use it at a school in North Carolina where he did not receive ESOL services:

They took me out of ESOL, and I saw that I needed it. But afterwards I realized that, since no one spoke Spanish at that school, I started learning a little more English. . . . So [as one of his teachers had suggested], it is true. I should get out of that class, because I know that I can learn more English when I am speaking only English, only English. (Manuel's interview, 2012).

Manuel's parents also expressed a strong desire for their children to learn English, relating this skill to the *salir adelante* discourse. His mother stated,

Thank God, he is getting a little better at studying English because, three or four years ago, at that time, he was really shy about speaking it. I used to tell him, "Try to speak English because here it is what you need." Because maybe we [parents] are silent; well, it's because we don't know how to speak English, we don't know. We might not even be able to order food in an American restaurant. I used to tell them, "Try your best because you kids have the opportunity to learn English." And, thank God, they have advanced. Now they do speak English. Maybe not all the time, but they can defend themselves enough. (Parent interview, Manuel's mother, 2012).

Reflecting on this process, in 2012, Manuel redefined the term, “bilingual” and included himself in his definition:

Bilingual. Hmm, it’s a word (laughs). It’s someone who can speak two languages, who can control them. I don’t know, maybe I am learning this, learning to control this, bilingualism, and speak two languages [English-Spanish]. ... I feel a little bilingual. Because now, before I didn’t know English, so now, suddenly, I got more into English. Yes, I feel a little bilingual. (Manuel’s interview, 2012).

Perhaps Manuel’s most profound reflection on his life and accomplishments was his 2012 response to my asking how he felt about being bilingual. He stated,

Hmm, I feel like, very proud, because maybe I haven’t done big things, but I have learned things. I have learned a lot of things about life. Because, they are important things, the most important. Like people say, forget about your past and live in the present. And go forward, don’t look back. I say, erase the bad things you have done and keep doing better things. (Manuel’s interview, 2012).

Discussion

This case study has explored the personal and educational, cultural-linguistic challenges and achievements of Manuel, a migrant farmworker student who has developed a bilingual-bicultural identity through a series of changes that prompted both resistance and acceptance. Manuel’s story was told through the themes of change, *acostumbrarse* (get used to it), *salir adelante* (get ahead), and bilingualism. His own reflections on his life through interviews and autobiographical writing, and those of his parents through interview, provided layered insights into

Manuel’s adaptation to change and negotiation of a third space identity.

Bilingual-Bicultural, Third Space Identities: A Process

Manuel’s creation of a third space identity emerged out of a series of intense personal and cultural-linguistic changes and his shifting along a continuum of resistance to acceptance of these changes. The process of *acostumbrarse* (getting used to it) was not easy for Manuel. In 2008, when he was in grade 8, age 14, Manuel positioned himself—in both his autobiographical writing and interview—as an unhappy teen. He felt sad that he had left his family in Mexico and wanted to return, resisted learning English, which he considered “very hard”, and was “depressed” by the language discrimination that he experienced in his new environment.

Looking back on this time in the 2012 interview, Manuel was able to understand that most of his previous unhappiness had come from his struggle to adjust to living with his parents for the first time, especially when they were working long/late hours and were not always available for him. He also expressed in 2012 that perhaps the greatest challenge for him, when he first came to the U.S., was the English language.

Indeed, when he was in grade 8, Manuel described learning a new language as “being born again”. This deep insight can be interpreted at two levels. First, in a more literal sense, being a language learner entails, at least initially, severe constraints on the ability to understand and speak. Especially in the case of adolescents and adults, the constraints of emerging, additional language acquisition can give the learner the sensation of feeling immature and limited, similar to a frustrated toddler without the words to express him/herself.

Second, and on a more metaphorical level, the idea of being born again through

language acquisition suggests that learning a new language is not only about mastering linguistic structures, but also about redesigning the learner's entire sense of self. Therefore, developing a new language, especially within the context of a new culture, also necessitates the creation of a new social identity that goes with that language. The metaphor of being born again through the process becoming bilingual-bicultural aligns with Bhabha's (1994) concept of the Third Space. That is, as the additional language emerges, the speaker's identity remains somewhere in-between the previous cultural-linguistic self and the new cultural-linguistic self (e.g., Sarroub, 2003). This, for Anzaldúa (1999), is the "place of contradictions": the border space.

For example, even at age 18, after six years in the U.S. being educated in English, Manuel only tentatively accepted his bilingual identity, stating, "I feel a little bilingual" (Manuel's interview, 2012). Thus, in 2012, he did not perceive himself as monolingual, like in 2008, nor did he confidently identify himself as bilingual. Instead, he positioned himself in an in-between space, somewhere along the path of becoming bilingual. Additionally, it is interesting that, in both 2008 and 2012, Manuel did not consider Otomi to be part of his linguistic/bilingual repertoire. That is, he did not position himself as a speaker of Otomi, but instead as occupying a third space, stating that he could understand it, but not speak it. For Manuel, being bilingual involves the use and, in his words, "control" of Spanish and English.

Apart from acquiring English, Manuel faced the challenge of adapting to life in the U.S. on other, familial and cultural levels. This process of *acostumbrarse* (get used to it) played an important role in Manuel's identity negotiation. In 2008, Manuel expressed with full certainty his resistance to living in the U.S. and his desire to return to Mexico, which he

considered his home. However, by 2012, he had softened the U.S.-Mexico divide, stating that he would like to continue his education in the U.S. and, later, go to Mexico "maybe to live or at least to travel" (Manuel's interview, 2012). Here again Manuel positioned himself in the third space, literally and metaphorically on the border between two cultures and identities.

The Meaning of Roots

For Manuel, the development of a third space identity is also related to the metaphor of roots. For example, when he talked about his connection to the Spanish language, he noted that it would always be a part of him because it was in his roots. These roots, for Manuel, include strong ties to his family: both his parents and younger sisters in the U.S., as well as the grandmothers, aunts, and older sisters that he left behind in Mexico. Indeed, as a child being raised without his parents in Mexico, Manuel identified himself as a, perhaps rootless, street kid. However, when he immigrated to the U.S. as an early adolescent, it was difficult for him to adjust to living with his parents and the "closed in" routine of going to school and then going back home every day.

After a few years had passed, when Manuel felt that his relationship with his parents had improved, he was able to let go of his street kid identity and embrace a new identity rooted in the *salir adelante* discourse. This included the goals of finishing school and learning English, and also aligned with his parents' dream of a better life for their children and an escape from working—with literal roots—in the fields. Perhaps it was this shift, influenced by his parents and, as his father suggested, religion, that gave Manuel the courage to stay in school and open up to learning English and using it as a tool to achieve his goals.

New Perspectives on Migrant Farmworker Students

Manuel has shown us that, when working with migrant farmworker students, it is important that we understand that these children are experiencing intense transitions and are learning to deal with them (*acostumbrarse*) as they mature and negotiate new, third space identities. In this way, Manuel's story suggests that educators should not view migrant farmworker students from a perspective of deficit, but instead within a framework of change. From this perspective, it becomes paramount to understand how to best support these students in their perpetual context of shifting geographic, familial, and cultural-linguistic contexts and related third space identities.

Applying the framework of change perspective to classrooms and schools that serve migrant farmworker students requires collaborative, critical dialogue to discover how educators and institutions can provide an oasis of stability, as well as both academic and moral support for migrant farmworker students in the school setting. Over a decade ago, Romanowski (2003) suggested that, to meet the needs of migrant farmworker students, schools should create safe, positive environments with culturally competent teachers and culturally relevant and consistent curricula. Similarly, Green (2003) recommended developing school cultures that welcome (both culturally and linguistically) migrant parents and families, value students' cultural-linguistic experiences, and provide ESOL services, drop-out prevention, and college and career counseling. In addition, and in light of Manuel's revelations, schools serving migrant farmworker students should be willing to invest class time to develop rapport and build inclusive communities where respectful and trusting relationships can thrive, both between the teacher and students, as well as among the students

themselves. These positive relationships, and the ability to view the classroom as safe space to be themselves and share their stories, could allow migrant farmworker students to feel less alone and better equipped to adapt to their ever-changing lives.

Manuel's story is one of change, resistance, acceptance, reflection, and maturation. In his life, he has faced challenges such as growing up in a family divided between two countries, immigrating the U.S. to begin living with his parents at age 12, learning English as an additional language, and picking crops from the age of 16. However, Manuel has also demonstrated tremendous resilience and insight into important life lessons. His reflections show us the importance of understanding migrant farmworker students from a perspective of change, and help us consider how we can support their bilingual-bicultural, third space identities.

Epilogue: Manuel's Present

Thanks to social media, I have been able to keep in touch with Manuel since our encounter in 2012. Coincidentally, just as I was completing this article, he contacted me to let me know that he had entered a technical school in Florida to study auto mechanics, his dream career path! The classes are in English; however, Manuel is optimistic. He wrote, in English, "Well, every day is a new day and every day I learn a new word." I am grateful to Manuel and his family for sharing their stories. May they continue to *salir adelante*.

Author Note

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About the Author

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Appendix

Manuel's Autobiographical Writing Topics, 2008

Narrative text topics (each topic elicited in both English and Spanish)

- Special or funny family memory
- First day of school in the U.S.

Expository text topics (each topic elicited in both English and Spanish)

- A person I admire
- Letter to a new student

Journal topics (composed in students' language of choice; for Manuel, always Spanish)

- Intro to journal (self-presentation)
- Happy moments
- Sad moments
- Problem or conflict
- The languages we speak
- Sports/hobbies
- Goals
- Tradition/family/culture
- Dream vacation
- Three wishes