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## Children “Left Behind”: Exploring the Nexus of Migration and Formal Education in Mexico

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**Children “Left Behind”: Exploring the Nexus of Migration and  
Formal Education in Mexico**

By

Tiffini Ayala

Accepted in Partial Completion  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

Kathleen L. Kitto, Dean of the Graduate School

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Chair, Dr. James Loucky

Dr. Joan Stevenson

Dr. Sean Bruna

## **MASTER'S THESIS**

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Tiffini Ayala  
May 9, 2017

**Children “Left Behind”: Exploring the Nexus of Migration and  
Formal Education in Mexico**

A Thesis  
Presented to  
The Faculty of  
Western Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

by  
Tiffini Ayala  
May 2017

## **Abstract**

Every year, thousands of Mexican men and women are forced to leave their families behind to move to the U.S. in search of better jobs to support their families. Research has shown that parental migration, or parental absence of any kind, can negatively impact children in the family. My research builds on this, and also addresses how the effects of parental migration are dealt with in Mexican public school settings. Familial connections allowed me to visit Guanajuato, a state in central Mexico. I volunteered in a public junior high school, conducted 33 semi-structured interviews, and collected data for four months. Most Mexican public schools do not have the funding for a school counselor or organized support groups, but most participants agreed that there is a great need for both in their schools. While volunteering in the junior high school, I was able to start a peer support program for children with a migrant parent(s). We practiced team-building exercises, discussed feelings associated with an absent parent, and met on a bi-weekly basis. My thesis explores how parental migration from central Mexico affects children left behind, and how the social process of migration is addressed in Mexican public schools. I assert that interpersonal relationships with teachers and family members, as well as strong peer relationships can help children cope with the difficulties of parental migration.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank my committee, Dr. James Loucky, Dr. Joan Stevenson, and Dr. Sean Bruna, for their support and guidance through this process. I am forever grateful for all the participants in this research, the staff at JLL, and the children who shared their stories and made the peer support group possible. I would like to thank my friends and family, especially my partner, Wesley, my Mom and Dad, and my Grandparents for their inspiration, love, and support.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Every year, Mexican men and women migrate to the United States in search of economic opportunities to support their families or to seek refuge from rising crime rates and a corrupt political system. Many strategically use migration to compensate for limited markets in Mexico, supplementing income and often saving for specific purposes, with the intention of returning to Mexico (Cohen and Sirkeci 2011; Durand and Massey 2004). Often overlooked in the narrative of U.S.-Mexico migration is the fact that thousands of children are left behind when their parents migrate to the United States (Esteinou 2004; Orellana 2009). These international separations subsequently create new transnational families, families “who are divided by international borders and who maintain significant emotional and economic ties in two countries” (Dreby 2010:5). Cohen and Sirkeci (2011) point out the importance of remembering the “stay-at-homes” or “non-movers” in the migration process, or the people that stay in the source community. They are critical social actors in the migration process, as most influence the decision to migrate, help facilitate the move, and receive remittances in order to survive.

Migrant parent-child relationships are in a constant state of fluctuation (Dreby 2008), as cross-border parenting presents its own unique challenges. Parental migration, or parental absence of any kind, can negatively impact children in a family. Children left behind often struggle

with a sense of abandonment, feeling sad and alone, without the physical and emotional support provided by both parents. The absence of a parent causes psychological stress for the child, adding new stressors on those left behind, as household duties, decision-making, and financial responsibilities change (Giannelli and Mangiavacchi 2010).

In the social migration process, children are often described as baggage: “brought along,” “sent for,” or “left behind” by sojourning parents (Orellana 2009). Most research on immigration has largely excluded children, and only recently has their participation in decisions to migrate been considered (Esteinou 2004; Orellana 2009). Scholars have focused on the overall process and effects of parental migration including children on the move, the use of cash remittances on education, and the emotional and mental effects on a child (Estrada 2006; Kandel 1999; Powers 2011; Wen, Ming, and Danhua Lin 2012). Nazario (2007) and Camissa et al. (2009) recount the heartbreaking journeys of children who ride the roofs of *El Tren de la Muerte* (The Train of Death) through Mexico, in hopes of reaching the United States. These children are often seeking reunification with their parents or other family members. More recently, Ansell (2016) dissects mobility among children in the twenty-first century, focusing on young people’s ties to migration, nationally and internationally, within a wider household. She examines how young people are involved in migration in

different ways, and how migration, or even the desire to migrate, shapes their experiences and outlooks on life.

Unique opportunities and challenges accompany the social processes of globalization and parental migration, as they continue to rapidly create growing transnational dynamics, economic ties, and cultural flows (Suarez-Orozco et al. 2004). It is imperative to focus on the intersection of migration and schooling, since children spend a significant part of their lives in the academic world. As children develop, they become more physically and cognitively independent from their parents, and peers begin to play a more important role. Studies have shown that positive peer relations can promote good behavior, confidence within social interactions, and provide emotional support and security (Wen and Lin 2012). Depression is directly linked to parent-child and teacher-child relationship quality (Guo et al. 2015), and a sense of relatedness with peers has been shown to lower depressive symptoms and behavioral problems (Allen et al. 2007).

### ***I. Experiencing Migration***

I was born and raised in the United States, and my father grew up in Moroleón, Guanajuato, a state in north-central Mexico (see Figure 1). My grandparents own a ranch in Portalitos, a small village on the outskirts of the city and I have visited them several times throughout my life. My family would spend weeks at a time at the ranch, usually in December, during holiday break, so I became familiar with this area. Most of the families in

Portalitos are distant relatives on my father's side, many of whom have seasonally migrated to the United States at some point in their lives. Over the years, I developed relationships with many people in Portalitos and this area grew to mean so much to me. My paternal grandfather, great-grandfather, and great-great grandfather left their families in Mexico to move to the United States to work and financially support their families, so I grew up hearing stories about their experience with migration. I also had several uncles that lived with my family when I was a child. They would come to America to work, sometimes for a year at a time, before returning to Mexico. So, I was around people that had to deal with the hardships of being apart from their families. I saw what it was like for them to miss their families, to call back home to speak with their children, to send money to their wives in Mexico. Eventually, 6 out of 7 of my father's siblings moved themselves and their families to the United States. As a second-generation immigrant, I desired to understand my father's side of the family, his story, and the story of my grandparents and aunts and uncles, who all grew up in Mexico and eventually made their way to the United States. My personal connections to this area, as well as the relationships I have made there furthered my interest in conducting research with the families in this city.

Figure 1. Map of Mexico



[http://maps.pickatrail.com/north\\_america/mexico/map/guanajuato.gif](http://maps.pickatrail.com/north_america/mexico/map/guanajuato.gif)

In 2012, I returned to Guanajuato. I volunteered in La Escuela Secundaria Javier Lopez Lopez, a public junior high school, conducted thirty-three semi-structured interviews with students and staff, and collected data over four months. Most Mexican public schools do not have the funding for a school counselor or organized support groups, but most participants agreed that there is a great need for both in their schools. While volunteering in the junior high school, I started a peer support program for children with a migrant parent(s). We practiced team-building exercises, discussed feelings associated with an absent parent, and met on a bi-weekly basis. This thesis is valuable because even though there is much research on migration, there are few studies that focus on children in the sending community. Even fewer

researchers have been able to work directly with children, as I did in Mexico. In this paper, I assert that interpersonal relationships with teachers and family members, as well as strong peer relationships can help children cope with the difficulties of parental migration.

This thesis is an applied project that further explores whether and how the social process of migration is addressed in Mexican public schools, how parental migration effects family dynamics as well as a child's educational performance, and the benefits of peer and other interpersonal relationships for children with migrant parents. All of these are topics that receive scant recognition in literature.

## ***II. Political Economy***

I draw from several theories throughout my research process, to explore migration, whether and how it is addressed in Mexican public schools, parental migration effects on a child, as well as the benefits of peer support and other healthy relationships for a child from a migrant family.

Many theories share the idea that there are certain economic, social, or political factors pushing individuals out of their native country and pulling them into another. Political economy is the theory that global capitalism infiltrates local sociocultural systems and people make decisions within these existing economic structures (Erickson and Murphy 2008). World-systems theory is the idea that a regions' economic and social structures are penetrated by external, capitalist societies, creating imbalances and a cycle of

international migration (Portes and Rumbaut 2014). As Massey et al. (1993:445) explains, “In essence, world-systems theory argues that the penetration of capitalist economic relations into non-capitalist and pre-capitalist societies creates a mobile population that is prone to migrate...International migration emerges as a natural outgrowth of disruptions and dislocations that inevitably occur in the process of capitalist development”. I employ political economy and world-systems theory as theoretical frameworks, as they provide reasoning for why people migrate, linking international economy to migration, and ultimately, in this case, creating transnational families and impacting children left behind.

### ***III. Education and Migration***

Suarez-Orozco et al. (2004) examine the intersection of migration and the education system, highlighting the importance of preparing today’s youth for the impacts of globalization. As migration continues to be in the spotlight, several scholars have also examined the mental, emotional, and behavioral effects of parental migration on children left behind in sending communities (Dreby 2010; Kandel 1999; Nobles 2011).

Structural family theorists focus on the disruption to existing family systems, which can create opportunities for families to reassign roles or change existing family structures of power or influence (Dreby 2010; Kandel 1999; Wen and Danhua 2012). Oftentimes, these transitions can be difficult

for children, as they become accustomed to new living arrangements or family dynamics.

I draw from Bowlby's attachment theory for a glimpse into developmental psychology, framing the importance and connectedness of family and peer systems on a young person's development (Brown and Mounts 2007). Attachment theory generally tends to surround mother-child relationships, but I extend the concept to focus on other relationships as well, including parent-child, teacher-child, and peer relationships.

#### ***IV. Thesis Organization***

My thesis aims to explore why people migrate, whether and how the social process of migration is addressed in Mexican public schools, how it affects children left behind, and whether children from migrant families can benefit from teacher and peer support. Chapter 2 leads the way by discussing the impacts of parental migration on children left behind in the sending community. These include emotional and psychological repercussions, educational and behavioral impacts, and shifts in family dynamics after a parent migrates. Chapter 3 is a brief analysis of why people migrate in our global economy and a history of U.S-Mexico migration. I also explores Guanajuato as a sending state, and discusses the use of remittances. This transitions into Chapter 4, which provides a description of the following: the setting of my research, my preliminary investigations, the methods used to gather data while in Mexico, the peer support group, and the limitations of



my research. Chapter 5 presents a summary of my research, including what I found through participant observation, interviews, and the creation of a peer support group for children from migrant families. I also briefly explore how children find resilience in adversity, and discuss opportunities for future research. I argue that interpersonal relationships with family members, teachers, and peers can be beneficial for children with migrant parents.

Figure 2. Author with Father, Grandfather, and Great-Grandfather



## Chapter 2: Children in Migration

*“Divided by borders and by the lifestyle differences involved in such separations, Mexican migrants and their children find ways to make their relationships with each other meaningful. These efforts are not easy. The difficulties parents and children endure make their stories both remarkable and unique.”-Joanna Dreby (Dreby 2010, ix-x)*

Migration, at its core, is separation. Families are torn apart and have to separate in order to stay together. The impacts of familial separation on children left behind is a topic that has received much attention in migration literature. Research concerned with the impacts of parental migration on children has focused primarily on five areas: scholastic performance, behavior, physical health, emotional and psychological health, and family dynamics (Cebotari and Mazzucato 2016; Dillon and Walsh 2012). The literature shows that the impacts on children vary by region and are affected by a number of factors such as the length of parental separation, the type of separation (paternal, maternal or both), the caregiving scenario of the child, the consistency of this arrangement, the socio-economic standing of the family, the health of family relationships, and cultural norms around gender and caregiving (Cebotari, Mazzucato, and Siegel 2017; Dillon and Walsh 2012). This thesis focuses particularly on the effects of parental migration on the emotional/psychological health, behavior, and school performance of children left behind.

Transnational families are often unprepared for the range of consequences that accompany migration. These include parental separation, emotional and psychological impacts, educational and behavioral impacts, difficulties adapting to changes (especially in school), intra-familial stress, potential stress over earnings, as well as the complications that may arrive when a partner or parent returns. Stressors and their manifestations are also rarely isolated nor temporary. For example, the absence of a parent often causes psychological stress on the child, but in this case, may also add new pressures on other family members left behind, as emotional, physical, and financial responsibilities adjust (Giannelli and Mangiavacchi 2010; Cohen and Sirkeci 2011). Furthermore, “the absence of their parents may imply the loss of their (most important) role models, nurturers, and caregivers, and this can translate into feelings of abandonment, vulnerability, and loss of self-esteem, among other problems” (González-Ferrer, Baizán, and Beauchemin 2012, 108).

*Once I made the decision to go to the states, everything changed. When I moved, it was so difficult and so hard because I knew I was going illegally. I didn't have papers. I didn't know when I was coming back. I didn't know how to tell my kids this. It's hard. Everyone, everything changed. My kids, school. Everything. No matter how much money or clothes I would send, the kids still wanted me there. My kids told me, "I fell down" or "I needed you in school and you weren't there." It was painful for me. It's hard because I was only there, working, to be paying something I owe over here. –Lucas, Parent of JLL student*

## ***I. Emotional Effects of Separation***

Family separation and parental absence is one of the most challenging circumstances children can face. It takes on several forms, such as the death of a parent, divorce, and migration (Wen and Danhua 2012). This thesis, like much of the research studying the impacts of parental absence on children, employs attachment theory, which emphasizes the importance of having a sensitive, responsive, caregiver (Bowlby 1982; Bretherton 1985; Dillon and Walsh 2012) and is used as a way to understand the mostly negative impacts observed upon the emotional and psychological health of children left behind. However, the use of attachment theory has been criticized for focusing on the negative impacts and framing children as “passive recipients, rather than active participants, emphasizing needs and deficiencies, rather than strengths and assets” (Dillon and Walsh 2012). My research addresses this criticism by virtue of direct interviews with the children, making them active participants.

Mexico is a nation of high emigration rates. In fact, child-father separation from migration can equally be attributed to that of divorce in Mexico (Cortes 2007; Nobles 2011), and has become so common that even children as young as five understand that their parents must head north (to *el norte*) in order to financially support their family back home; yet, many of them feel resentment because of their parents’ absence (Dreby 2008).

The literature regarding migration and children reveals that children often express more pain about the transnational migration of a parent than do their parents (Coe et al. 2011; Dreby 2010). They are more eager to openly express their grief over the scattering of their family members, as well as the quality of life and care they receive after a parent migrates (Coe et al. 2011). Parental absence is a natural consequence of parental migration and has large emotional and social effects on the child left behind. A study of parental migration in China, for example, shows that more than half of the sampled junior high students with migrant parents reported difficulties adapting to their left-behind life, expressing feelings of abandonment and anguish (Liang and Ma 2004). Children in Latin America from migrant families also tend to withdraw emotionally, often feeling a sense of abandonment and lack of intimacy (Parreñas 2005). These negative emotional implications can have impacts on the scholastic performance of children from migrant families.

## ***II. Educational Impacts of Separation***

Studies focusing on the impacts of parental migration on the educational performance of children left behind show a complex story with often conflicting reports. On the one hand, some studies have shown that the absence of a household member can negatively impact a child's development, especially regarding their education (Powers 2011). The physical and emotional distance of children from a parent can have various effects on their

aspirations and behaviors, specifically on their performance in school, and even teachers have noted that misbehavior increases when a child's parent migrates (Kandel 1999).

*It's a big difference because those kids are often distracted and don't pay attention. If I ask them a question, they often tell me that they don't care about the class or the school. – Ana, JLL teacher*

*I notice that the students that have parents in the United States are unorganized. They don't bring the materials they need to class. They rebel, and they don't care about school. I notice it in the way they dress and what clothes they wear to school. I notice that emotionally, the students are shy. They are conflicted people, and I can see it. –Paula, JLL teacher*

Previous qualitative research also suggests that children with migrant parents develop behavioral issues at a much higher rate than children from nonmigrant families (Zhao 2004), and are more likely to dropout than children living with both parents (Kandel and Kao 2001).

On the other hand, the remittances provided by parents working abroad can result in a financial boost, allowing children to take advantage of educational opportunities (if available) such as extra-curricular activities or tutorials (González-Ferrer, Baizán, and Beauchemin 2012; Maruja and Ruiz-Marave 2013). In societies described as traditionally patriarchal, such as Senegal or Romania, studies showed improved scholastic performance in children of migrant fathers and negative impacts for those with migrant mothers (Adumitroaie and Dafinoiu 2013; González-Ferrer, Baizán, and

Beauchemin 2012). This has been related the gendered expectations around caregiving in these countries. Since women are expected to do the bulk of nurturing in the family context, their absence is more stigmatized than paternal migration in the community and results in greater distress for the children left behind. This can manifest in poor academic performance.

In Mexico, the varying reports on comparing the impacts of maternal versus paternal migration has been attributed in part to the custom of distributing the responsibility of childcare among multiple generations in the family and extended kin (Dillon and Walsh 2012; Tang 2017). Also, the frequent occurrence of parental migration can have the effect of destigmatizing it in these communities (Cebotari and Mazzucato 2016; Dillon and Walsh 2012; Ren and Treiman 2013).

### ***III. Shifts in Family Dynamics***

Many migrant families find emotional and tangible benefits in developing new social networks during the migration process, which often consist of family members, friends, and other contacts in both their sending and receiving communities (Estrada 2006; Massey 1987). Although these networks provide great support for migrants and their families, there are inevitable household shifts, and children may have to live with a single parent, grandparents, older siblings, or other family members when their parent(s) move to the United States (Dreby 2010). In turn, the child often feels a sense of abandonment, and the parents can experience a new lack of

power or control in their child's life (Dreby 2007). Other effects of parental migration on a child can include lessened supervision, weakened parental support and guidance, and the lack of parent-child bonding (Wen and Danhua 2012).

Mexico is traditionally a patriarchal society, but as migration to the United States has become more common, women are finding themselves in new roles, altering traditional gender relations. Women are intimately involved in the migration process, whether as daughters or mothers and wives left behind, or as migrants themselves. Female migration from Mexico to the United States continues to be on the rise (Cohen and Sirkeci 2011; Dreby 2012), however there was not much evidence of this in my particular study in Guanajuato. All participants lived with their mothers, while their fathers were working in the United States. When a male household head migrates, the woman left behind often has a new sense of authority and independence, as everyday decisions such as financial spending and discipline are in her hands. Since fathers are often seen as the main disciplinarians in a family, when they leave, Mexican mothers and fathers may find themselves in unfamiliar roles (Kandel 1999; Cohen and Sirkeci 2011), as they navigate cross-border parenting and communication. Furthermore, when the male returns, it can be difficult for them to reclaim their prior influence or power in family relations (Durand and Massey 2004). The separation from parental migration can be



particularly distressful for adolescents who often have trouble adjusting to their new environments, the change in parental authority, as well as new forms of communication (Artico 2003; Menjivar 2000; Smith, Lalonde, and Johnson 2004). These kinds of long-term separations have unique dynamics and implications for transnational families. As globalization and migration continue to create new transnational social dynamics, and consequently impacting families and children left behind, it is important for schools to provide students with the necessary support for dealing with the challenges created by these international ties.

Based on the existing literature on the effects of parental migration on children left behind in Mexico and Central America, I expected to find that parental absence has negative impacts on the behavior and emotional/psychological health of children, but that mixed results (both positive and negative) might be discovered in regards to the scholastic performance of children.

### Chapter 3: Mexican Migration

*[Migration] is something really difficult. It's hard for the migrant and it's hard for the people that stay behind. It's too complicated of a subject to give my opinion on immigration. It could be difficult for the people that stay, but economically beneficial at the moment. Later, you might not know if it was the right decision because your kids complain and wonder why their dad was not there, or absent from their lives. They don't understand. Even if you give them gifts or call them. It's so hard. The bills we have to pay are so hard. We don't know if it's good or bad to go to the United States. The future will tell. –Lucas, Parent of JLL student*

As the quote above alludes to, human migration is ubiquitous, and has today become a global phenomenon, involving nearly all developing countries. International migration is mainly driven by economic globalization (Cohen and Sirkeci 2011; Ho and Loucky 2012). In the discussion that follows, I employ political economy and world-systems theories to frame why people move from Mexico to the United States. Political economy asserts that people make decisions, such as whether and when to migrate, within existing economic structures (Erickson and Murphy 2008), while world systems conjectures that capitalist economies infiltrate other nations, creating imbalances and forcing people to migrate. Transnationalism, a term first introduced by Randolph Bourne in the early 1900s, referring to migrants who leave their homeland and in so doing, create bidirectional flows of resources (Bourne 1916), has today become something of a truism. People everywhere move back and forth across nation-state borders, but hardly do they discard wholly or replace connectedness or identities grounded in places of origin or

prior residence. These dynamics create fluidity within families, impacting mothers and fathers as well as children, in learning to maintain relationships and operate across national borders (Crivello 2015).

In this chapter, I examine the dependency and asymmetries characterizing the economic relationship between the United States and Mexico, and their implications for recent patterns of migration from Guanajuato state to the United States. Exploring the complex relationship between Mexico and the United States provides a foundation for better comprehending why people migrate, and ultimately how these migrations impact the lives of children left behind in the sending community.

### ***I. United States–Mexico Migration***

Each year, Mexican men and women leave their families and homes and migrate to both highly industrialized and rural parts of the United States (Dreby 2010; Massey 1987). Some people move for long durations, and many have continued cross-border lives. Reasons why people migrate are many and complex. There are sometimes limited economic opportunities or financial emergencies in Mexican sending communities, so household members often move to make money to support families in Mexico (Ganster and Lorey 2008; Kandel 1999). Political corruption, rising crime rates, hunger, violence within their home country, and efforts to reunite with family members are all reasons why many are compelled to migrate (Cohen and Sirkeci 2011; Durand and Massey 2004). Millions of families across both the

United States and Mexico are affected by these migrations. These living realities range from one-time stays or repeat journeys to permanent migrations, which often result in well-established jobs and social networks in the United States. At the same time, however, migration hinges on separations and re-groupings. Cycles of migration are sustained and perpetuated through the creation of supportive social networks in both the sending and receiving communities. Not only do these help reduce the cost of international movement (Massey 1987), they also help constitute a culture of migration, and especially a culture of transnational migration, evident through the development of social, religious, and economic relationships that flow between two nations (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994; Massey et al. 1993). For many migrants, including those from Mexico, migration proves to not be a permanent solution to economic hardships, but rather a fluid journey, with fluctuations, flows, and even reversals.

Today, the United States and Mexico are inextricably intertwined and economically interdependent upon one another, and the history between these two countries has been arduous and complex. In the mid-1800s, the Mexican-American War erupted over unresolved border disputes, as the United States expanded its territory across the continent. This ended with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which recognized the Rio Grande as the southern border of the United States. The war resulted in Mexico losing a third of its territory, beginning a continuous, tumultuous

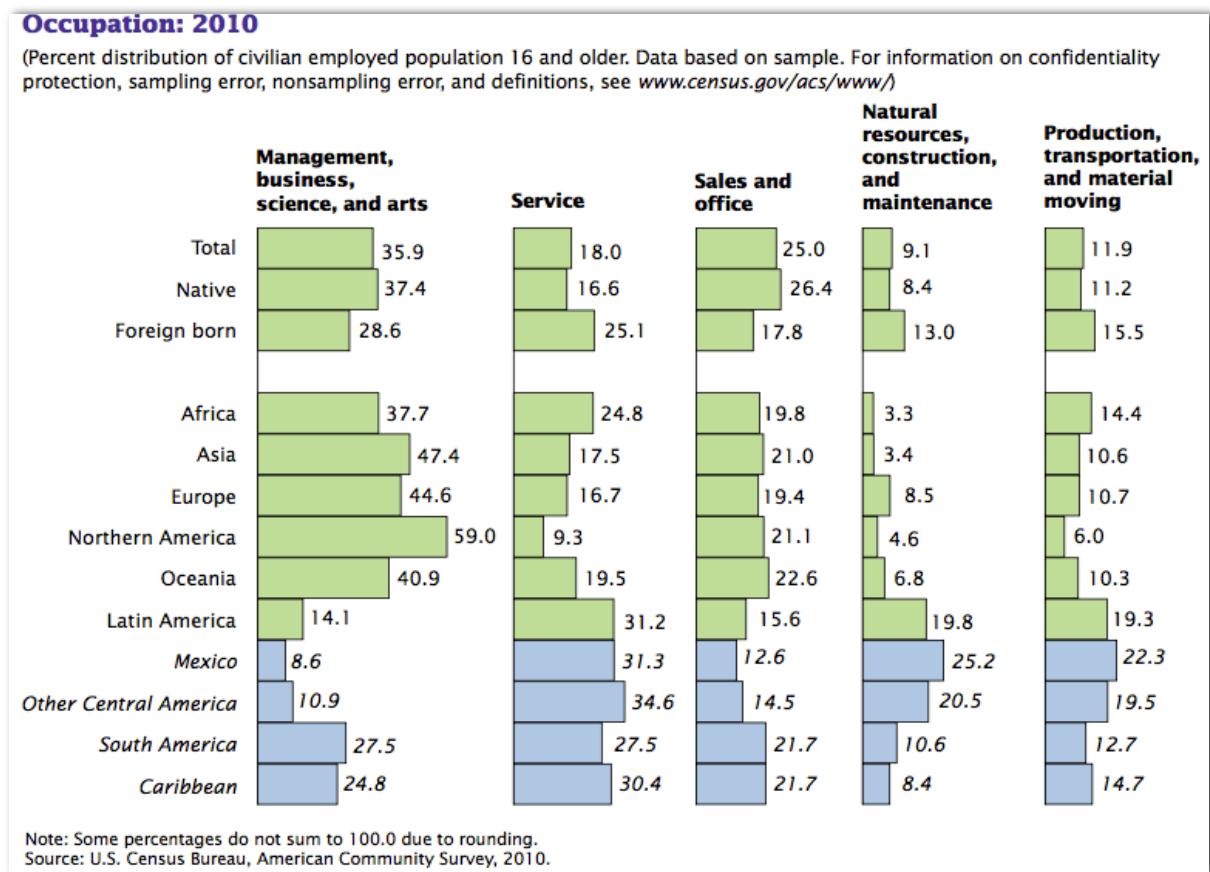
relationship between two countries, as people were forced to move and resettle. The 1800s also brought about economic restructuring in America, prompted by the rapid development of the railroad system, as well as mining and agriculture, which encouraged an influx of immigrants in pursuit of work (Fomby 2005). The 20<sup>th</sup> century began with the Mexican Revolution, prompting more immigration as people fled violence within Mexico. Immigration has been steady since World War II, when thousands of Mexicans moved to America in order to provide temporary agricultural labor during the war (Alba 2010; Ganster and Lorey 2008). This fundamental relationship has only deepened since the ratification of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994. At the time, both former President Clinton and Mexican President Salinas argued that NAFTA would stimulate economic opportunities between the two countries, as well as help to reduce unauthorized migration (Castles and Miller 2009). However, this proved to be false. When the government pulled subsidies for agriculture, Mexican farmers could no longer make a profit from selling their crops locally, and often even lost money. Many were forced to move north (Lopez 2007). The influx of migration into the United States expanded in the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, due to high unemployment rates in sending communities, as well as the continued need for cheap labor (Sawyer 2010), but has steadily declined as stricter immigration policies have been enforced since 9/11, igniting fear of deportation in many crossing the border (Alden 2008).

Castañeda (2007) considers a more recent culture of migration in the United States, claiming that increased border enforcement and domestic policies make immigrants out of migrants. Fences and stricter laws discourage seasonal migrant workers from returning to Mexico, and instead, encourage them to permanently settle in the United States, and oftentimes they send for their families to join them. These disruptions, which have influenced the relative permanence of migration, connecting our countries even more, may account for the increasing number of immigrant workers in the United States.

Today, Mexico's number one trading partner and chief source of capital is the United States, while Mexico is the United States' second most significant trading partner (Campos-Vazquez, Raymundo, and Sobarzo 2012; Estrada 2006). In 2009, over 70 percent of the nearly 11 million immigrants from Mexico age 16 and older were in the civilian labor force (Campos-Vazquez and Sobarzo 2012). Figure 3, which represents the numbers and general occupations of Mexican and other foreign-born workers in the United States' labor force in 2010, reveals that the Mexican population accounts for the majority of workers in three out of five categories: service, natural resources, construction and maintenance, and production, transportation, and material moving. As of 2015, there were approximately 43.3 million immigrants living in the United States (Jie Zong and Batalova n.d.), representing nearly 14 percent of the 321 million people residing in the

nation. Of that number of, 11.6 million came from Mexico, approximately 27 percent of all U.S. immigrants. Furthermore, immigrants and their U.S.-born children now account for about one-quarter of the total U.S. population (Ho and Loucky 2012; Zong and Batalova n.d.). These numbers may reflect the changing current of migration, as people begin to settle in the United States, rather than return to Mexico.

Figure 3. Occupation: 2010 Percent Distribution of Civilian Employed Population 16 and Older in the United States (Grieco, et al. 2012).



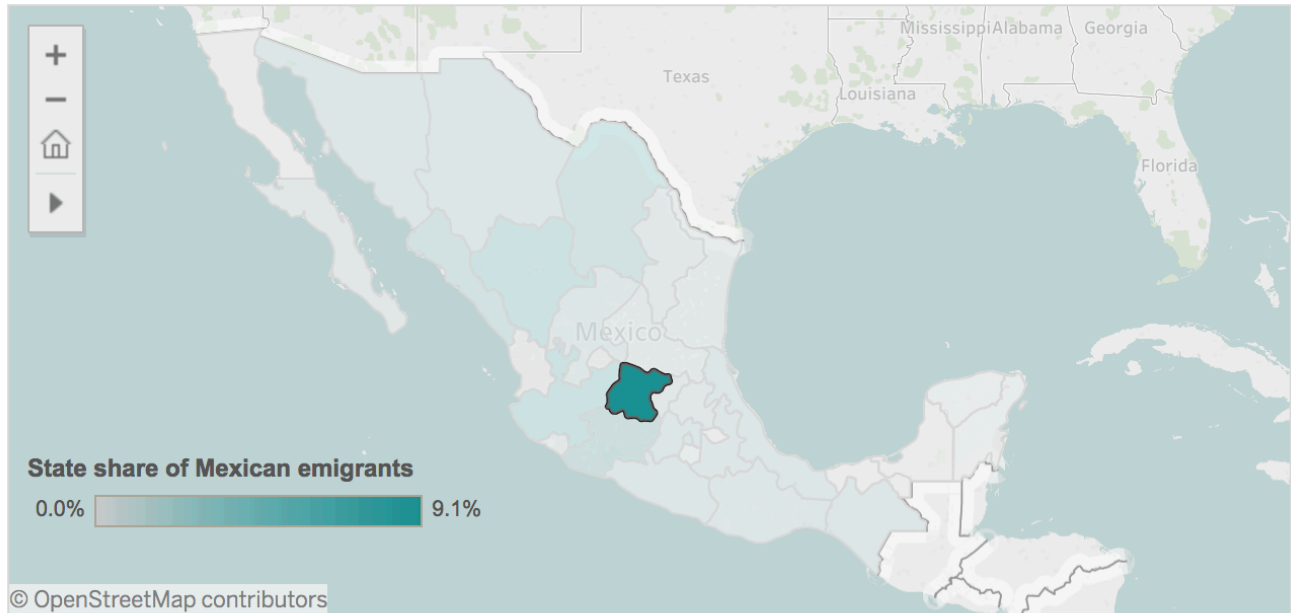
## ***II. Guanajuato Migration***

A large percentage of total Mexican migrants to the United States come from North-central Mexico, which includes the state of Guanajuato. Historically the main migration region of Mexico, it remains the region of highest density of movement of people to the United States (Durand and Massey 2003). Guanajuato has one of the lowest unemployment rates in Mexico, and their export level is three times higher than the national average (Standish 2009). Even with declining numbers of immigrants moving to the United States (see Figure 4), remittances continue to be a large source of foreign income for the area, once again interweaving the United States and Mexico.

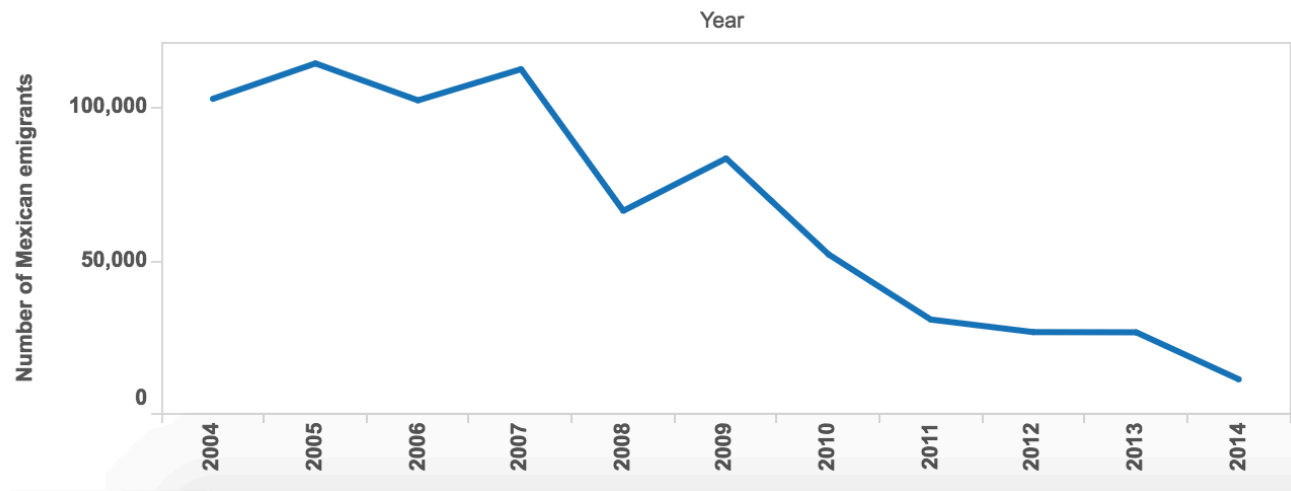


Figure 4. Origins of Mexican Migrants to the United States by Mexican State of Residence, Number, and Share, 2004-2014 (MPI 2017).

### Number and Share of Mexican Migrants to the United States by Mexican State of Residence, 2004-2014



### Number of Mexican Migrants to the United States, 2004-2014



### III. Remittances

*He [dad] goes to provide a better life for us...to send money. –  
Esperanza, JLL student*

*My dad doesn't like to work here because he makes more money in the United States. –Santiago, JLL student*

*...To provide a better education and lifestyle, so that we don't have to do the same thing he's going right now. –Alejandro, JLL student*

One of the largest implications of the Mexico-U.S. migratory situation is the flow of remittances into Mexico, representing a solid and continuous set of linked relationships. These cash remittances, sent from family members in the United States, comprise the largest source of foreign currency funneled into Latin America, and they are often essential for the survival of families left behind (Campos-Vazquez, Raymundo, and Horacio Sobarzo 2012; Estrada 2006). According to the household strategy theory, sending remittances to the source household on a regular basis allows the migrant family member to maximize the family's economic welfare at a household level (Stark and Bloom 1985). Cash remittances also open new venues of healthcare, economic development, and other opportunities for sending communities (Estrada 2006). Some research has shown that infants and children in migrant households have better health and healthcare than children from non-migrant households (Frank 2005; Kanaiaupuni and Donato 1999). In many cases, a portion of the money sent home from a migrant parent is intended to boost costly educational opportunities, which may include books, tuition, and transportation (Campos-Vazquez, Raymundo, and Horacio Sobarzo 2012; Powers 2011). Ironically, this sometimes leads to students making less effort in school if they anticipate migrating to the

United States for labor (Powers 2011:3). In fact, some Mexican schools report lower attendance rates from students with migrant parents, since their highest ambition lies in following their parents to the United States (Ho and Loucky 2012). If a child concludes that their future lies in America, they often forego higher education in order to focus on qualities that will make them more valuable in the American labor market, such as documentation, a better understanding of the English language, and social networking (Dreby 2010; Kandel 1999; Massey 1987).

Remittances do not exclusively determine a child's educational attainment (Sawyer 2010) and are often used to meet survival needs or to save and buy land or build houses (Adi 2003), which I found to be the case in JLL. Most participants agreed that money families received from migrant parents in the states was used for necessities, such as bills, groceries, and clothing.

*Most of the students here come from low socio-economic status families. Most of the families choose to use the money on other necessities, like good nutrition, or to pay for phones, electricity, and water. –Gabriel, Director of JLL*

*He goes to provide the necessities in life, for my family. –Samuel, JLL student*

Although remittances were not a primary focus in my research, they are a tangible element of migration, which helps children cope with the absence of their father, enforcing their commitment to their families back

home and even providing a sense of hope for the future. Therefore, I directed some of my research attention to exploring the various ways in which parental migration impacts children left behind in the source community.

Human movement across nation-state borders will continue to transpire. Understanding why people migrate, particularly in the context of the complex relationship between Mexico and the United States, and involving mechanisms like the use of remittances, provides a framework for understanding not only parental migration, but also the effects on children left behind.

## Chapter 4: Ethnographic Context

In this chapter, I discuss the ethnographic context of my research, including the setting, my preliminary research, and how I came to work with participants in La Escuela Secundaria Javier Lopez Lopez (hereafter, JLL). I address the evolution and methodology of my research, including participant observation, interviews, and the development of a peer support program, which provided a safe environment for students from migrant families to connect with each other and draw support from other children sharing similar experiences in life. I also discuss the limitations of my research.

### *I. Setting*

Guanajuato state lies on the Mesa Central del Sur, a high plateau region with high volcanic activity and several large lakes and wetlands. These characteristics combined with a temperate climate and abundant rainfall creates a supportive environment for agriculture and farming, which sustains many families in the area. Moroleón is a southern municipality in the state of Guanajuato, a city rich in culture and art, known for its bustling textile industry, attracting visitors from around the country (Mesa Central | Plateau Region, Mexico n.d.). Burgeoning businesses, new buildings, and streetways filled with mopeds and taxis collide with established family businesses, historical architecture, and narrow roads overflowing with people. To me, this dichotomy is a perfect depiction of what makes Moroleón

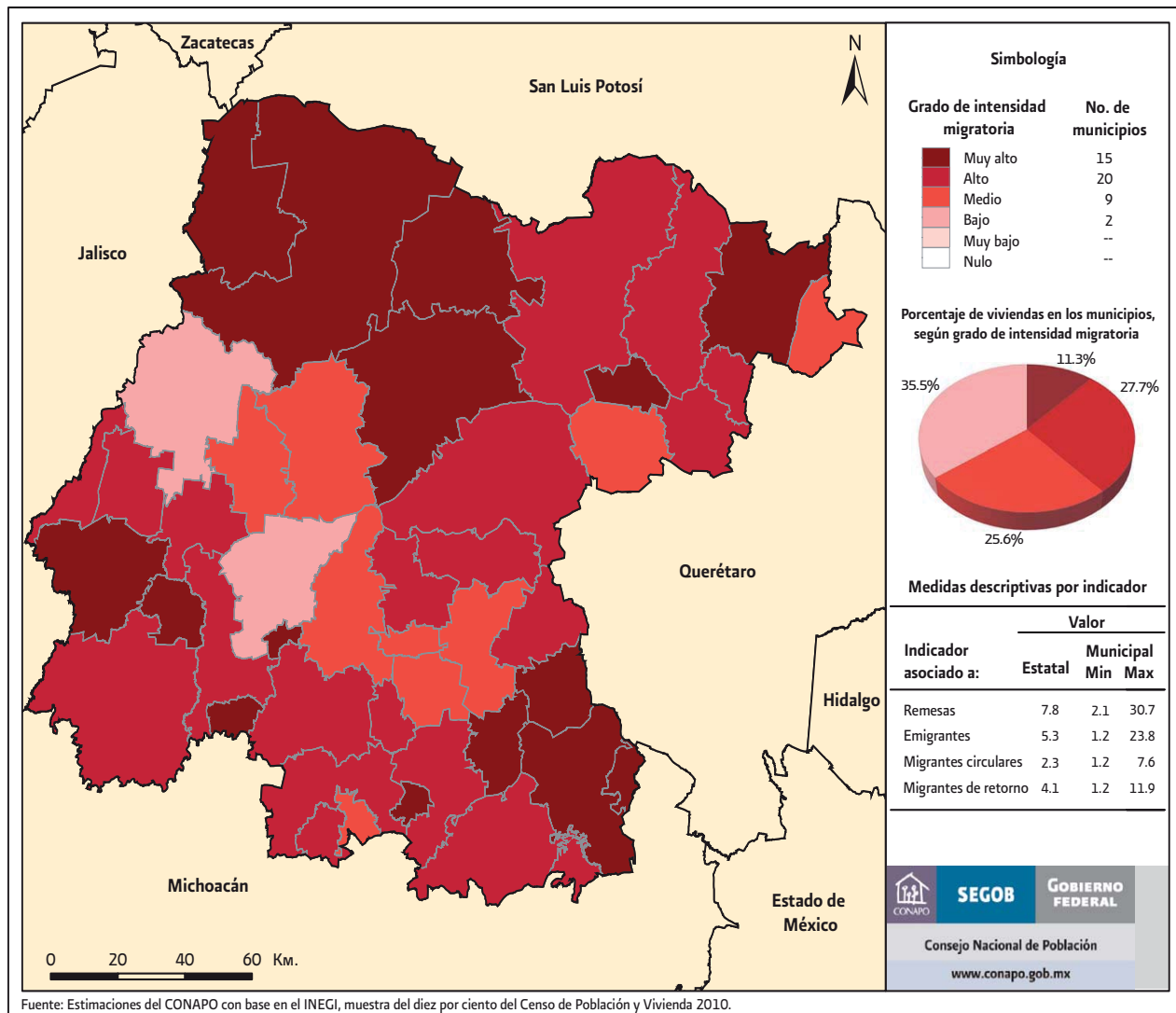
such a dynamic city, the new and old, communities within a community, all connected by a common thread of traditions and pride, which transcends generations.

In the Mexican census of 2010, Moroleón had a population of approximately 49,364 inhabitants. This area has a long history with out-migration to the United States (Durand and Massey 2003), which contributes to the many reasons I chose to do my research here. In 2010, the Mexican state of Guanajuato was responsible for 11% of the total number of Mexican citizens that migrated to the United States. The state of Michoacán, which borders Guanajuato to the south, accounted for nearly 16% of the total number of Mexican migrants to the United States that year and Jalisco, the western bordering state was responsible for 10% (Britz and Batalova 2013). According to Figure 5., 64.6% of households in Guanajuato state have “medium” to “very high” degrees of out-migration. The municipality of Moroleón has a high (“alto”) degree of migration (see Figure 5) (Tuiran, Fuentes, and Avila n.d.).

Figure 5. Map of Guanajuato: Degree of Migration Intensity by Municipality

Anexo B. Índices de intensidad migratoria México-Estados Unidos por entidad federativa y municipio

Mapa B.11. Guanajuato: Grado de intensidad migratoria por municipio, 2010



(Tuiran, Fuentes, and Avila n.d.)

My research is rooted in the Mexican school system, which is centralized at the federal level. There are three levels that students progress through: primaria (primary school, grades 1-6), secundaria (middle school, grades 7-9), and preparatoria or tecnica (high school, grades 10-12) (Kandel

1999). Attendance is under-enforced, especially in rural areas of Mexico (Guevara 1992). Although public schools in Mexico are free, many families do not send their children to high school, or even middle school, because it is more financially beneficial for those children to work and provide their family with additional income (Abrego 2014). Educational attainment in Mexico does not always have a large economic reward. Education beyond a certain level is not cost effective, because there are not enough jobs to offset the additional cost of more schooling (Kandel 1999), thus encouraging a cycle of migration.

## ***II. Preliminary Research***

In order to prepare for my research project, I made a preliminary research trip to Moroleón, Guanajuato, in early 2012, to speak with school administrators in person and to discuss potential research routes. After speaking with several directors and teachers, four schools in Moroleón gave me permission to conduct research in their schools. Two of the schools are primary schools – one public and one private – and two of the schools are secondary – one public and one private.

When I spoke with the directors of the schools, I received varying answers regarding how schools were influenced by migration. The directors of the private schools agreed that parental migration was not a common concern in their schools. Most of the students' parents lived and worked in Moroleón and could afford to send their children to a private school. On the



other hand, the directors of the public schools discussed problems with parental migration affecting the behavioral and academic performance of their students. However, they did not have any formal assistance (i.e., programs, support groups, etc.) in their schools to help children cope with the absence of a parent, though they did express the need for this. This information led me to ultimately decide to focus on children from migrant families, and whether and how Mexican schools were helping children cope with the difficulties that affected their behavioral or academic performance. Since I obtained this information before conducting my field research, I had a stronger understanding of what to expect when I arrived.

Originally, I planned to work with all four schools at various times during my research, in order to provide a more expansive data collection, which included populations of varying ages and social classes. However, once I arrived in Mexico, I quickly realized that my time would be best spent in one school. The two private schools would not provide relevant data to my research since most of the students did not have migrant parents. The other public school was small and attendance was irregular, so conducting regular participant observation and interviews would have been difficult. Ultimately, I chose to do my research in J. Javier Lopez Lopez, a public middle school in the heart of Moroleón. Using the two most common means of data collection in anthropology, observation and interviews, I grounded my methods in theories relating to migration, family dynamics, and culture change. This

inductive research allowed me to search for patterns and develop theories based on my findings. In addition, before initiating data collection, my study had the approval of the Internal Review Board of Western Washington University. All participants were given pseudonyms and all read and signed an interview informed consent waiver, which can be found in the appendices of this thesis.

### ***III. Data Collection***

My research involved participant-observation in the community and schools of Moroleón for four months in 2012, from August through November. I began by spending several weeks prior to the start of the academic year adjusting to my new surroundings and visiting the school to meet the staff. Once school began, I spent time observing and participating in classroom settings, in order to identify common recurring themes on issues dealing with migration to the United States. Working in close proximity with students and teachers allowed me to build trusting relationships and delve further into my research. As part of my intent to foster reciprocity, I had planned to volunteer my time as a tutor and teacher's-assistant. However, once the director and teachers of the school had a better understanding of my research, they encouraged me to create a peer support program for students with a migrant parent. This was my main form of reciprocity, but I also made myself available to assist in classrooms.

Taking a holistic, inclusive and flexible approach, I conducted informal, unstructured and semistructured interviews, scheduling these at the convenience of participants, teachers, administration, and students. By doing informal interviewing at the beginning of my fieldwork, I was able to build rapport with my participants. Participant-observation involved continuous jottings of notes throughout the day, and later analyzing these in order to produce more detailed field notes. Because I did long-term fieldwork in the school, over a period of four months, I conducted unstructured interviews, which are designed to get people to open up and discuss open-ended topics on their terms (Bernard 2011:157).

During my time in Mexico, I interviewed three people outside of the school. I interviewed my translator, Elizabeth, who became a good friend of mine. She had valuable personal experience with migration, since her husband lived in the United States for several years, while she lived in Mexico with her two children. She was also a teacher at a private school, and was getting her master's degree in teaching, at the time, so I helped translate her thesis into English, in exchange for her translating formal interviews. I formally interviewed one parent of a student in the peer support group. He used to seasonally migrate to the United States for work. I also interviewed a professor in the Linguistics department at the University of Guanajuato.

During my preliminary visit to Moroleón in April 2012, the schools agreed to the distribution of a brief questionnaire (see Appendix A: part 1) to

the administrators and teachers. The questionnaire consisted of broad questions, with potential leads to non-invasive, follow-up questions (see Appendix A: part 2). I found key participants that showed interest in my research and agreed to a more in-depth (semistructured) interview (see Appendix A: part 3). As part of semistructured interviews, I built an interview guide, with a clear list of topics and questions that needed to be covered, in order to produce reliable qualitative data. As instructed by Spradley (1980), I was flexible in allowing the direction of the interview to flow, as long as all topics were covered during the session. After receiving permission from the volunteer students and their parents, I created a twenty-two-question student interview (see Appendix B). The interviews I conducted gave me valuable insight into the directors', teachers', and students' views on the effects of parental migration.

I used my field notes and interviews to find patterns, common themes, and provide insight into how Mexican schools confront (or do not confront) the topic, as well as understand the effects of parental migration and how schools can better help students from migrant families.

#### ***IV. Inclusion of Child Perspective***

As my research began and transformed over the first several weeks in Mexico, I began to realize the importance of interviewing children, hearing first-hand experiences about parental migration, rather than only hearing it from teachers and staff at JLL. In the 1980s and 1990s, anthropologists and

other social scientists began to adjust a prevailing view of children as mere silent spectators of their surroundings. Evidence that children are active participants within their environments has in turn provided a unique window into child advocacy and effective policy formation. “Giving voice to children’s voices” means that one conducts research with, rather than on children, and “giving voice to children is not simply or only about letting children speak; it is about exploring the unique contribution to our understanding of and theorizing about the social world that children’s perspectives can provide” (James 2007: 262). I hoped to not only hear the voices of my participants, but also use their voices to develop child-centered strategies for dealing with the difficulties of parental migration, which included the development of a peer support group.

There are many factors one needs to consider when giving voice to children. The task is not simple, and context is key. The idea of “children” or “childhood” cannot properly represent an entire population of people under a specified age. Children are individuals, representing a personalized life, with unique backgrounds, values, and needs. The concern goes beyond allowing their voice to be heard. Who is representing their voices, and how are these voices being manipulated, adjusted, or properly represented (James 2007)? Children are very capable of being active participants in the research conducted, as well as the policies being made or changed. “Through participation children learn to become effective in challenging the sources of

their own exploitation and to develop their own agendas for transformation. Thus, participation is empowering of children, both in the present and in the future” (Ansell 2005: 235). After arriving at the school and gaining a better understanding of the culture of migration in the school, I decided to interview students as well as teachers. This allowed me to speak directly to the children and understand their struggles from their perspective, rather than only through observations and teacher interviews. As my research began and transformed over the first several weeks in Mexico, I hoped to not only hear the voices of my participants, but also use their voices to develop child-centered strategies for dealing with difficulties of parental migration, which included the development of a peer support group.

## ***V. Peer Support Group***

After arriving in Moroleón and spending some time at the school, it became evident that there was little institutional support for students with migrant parents. My research direction therefore shifted. My original question was broad and did not easily permit further inquiries, so I adjusted it. “How is parental migration dealt with in Mexican public schools?” became two questions: “Why is parental migration not a topic that is systematically dealt with in Mexican public schools?” and “How can students from migrant families find the support they need?” These questions eventually led me to investigating peer support groups for those children with a migrant parent.

The success of “Our Military Kids”, a U.S.-based community support network that helps children cope with the stress of a deployed parent through social, recreational, and educational programs (“Home” 2017), was one exemplary approach that I was able to emulate. I was also influenced by Wen and Lin’s (2012) work, which focused on children left behind by migrant parents in China. They found that positive peer relations could counter behavioral problems and depressive symptoms, while also providing emotional support and positive social development.

When I arrived at JLL, most of the staff members were overwhelmingly open, and even curious, about my work, though some were hesitant. Alma, la prefecta (which is the equivalent of a dean), became one of my main research participants. She worked closely with students and was invaluable for this research, as she knew which students had parent(s) in the United States, and was quick to offer interviews with them. I first had to obtain written permission from their parents. Alma helped distribute memos to the students from migrant families, requesting that a guardian attend a meeting at JLL, where I would explain my research process, interviews, and the peer support group, as well as answer any questions they might have. Alma, as well as the director of the school, also generously offered a spare classroom where I could meet with students, conduct interviews, and eventually lead the peer support group.

We set a date for the parent meeting and distributed 45 -50 memos to the students Alma knew had a parent in the United States. At the time, JLL had 368 students, which means approximately 14% had a parent in the United States. Alma speculated there were a lot more students with a migrant parent(s) than that, but that some families did not want people to know, even school personnel. About twenty parents showed up to the meeting. There were two men in the group, which showed me that most of the kids I would be working with had fathers in the United States, with mothers who stayed behind. I introduced myself, explained my connection to the area, as well as my thesis, interviews, and peer support group. Parents had several concerns about the meetings taking away from their child's schooling and the program revealing the identity of the family member in the United States. I assured them that the meetings were voluntary and would take place during a break between lunch and afternoon classes, and that the interview questions would not include names or locations of family members. I answered any questions the parents had and before the meeting ended, many signed the participation consent and media release forms for their children to participate in the interview and peer support group, while others took the forms home to review. One father approached me at the end of the meeting and asked if his son could participate in the peer support group. He explained that he used to live in the United States, and that his son would be able to relate to the other children in the group because he understood what



it is like to have a father who lives in another country. I told him the group was for anyone who wanted to participate, and he generously offered to help with anything I might need. As a parent of a student at the school, he provided unique insights into parental migration and the tensions it generates. The low number of parents at the meeting, as well as the many questions, fears, and concerns, gave me a clearer understanding of how I needed to delicately approach an issue as complex as migration.

One week after the meeting with the parents, we had our first peer support group. In total, I received thirteen signed consent forms back from parents, and 9 out of those 13 students showed up to the first meeting. At first, the students seemed nervous, but we made conversation, played a couple of games, decorated name tags, and by the end of our first meeting, they did not want to leave and were excited to return. Over the next month and a half, we continued to have peer support group meetings, scheduled for twice per week. Some were more successful than others. There were a few times school was cancelled, or another mandatory meeting was being held during break, so we were unable to meet. During the meetings that we did have, we played games and made journals for the students to use. I facilitated open discussions where they expressed their thoughts and feelings about parental migration. Some of the time was used to conduct interviews with individuals, while the rest of the students wrote in their journals or played games. Some students wrote letters to their fathers in the United

States. Another time we discussed how to videochat, so they could see their fathers while they talked. Results from student interviews (see Appendix C), as well as the analysis for peer support groups can be found in subsequent chapters.

Figure 6. Peer Support Group with Author



## ***VI. Limitations of Research***

I would like to point out that there were several limitations with my research, so the reader is aware that my findings are specific to a small sample from one school. These limitations range from inherent personal restrictions to physical restrictions, such as a limited amount of time and number of participants.

Some limitations I faced arose from the language barrier as well as cultural differences. Although I could carry on a conversation in Spanish, I was not fluent. In order to obtain accurate information and correctly quote my participants, I decided to have a translator present during the formal interviews. This also allowed for any clarification needed between myself and the interviewee.

Because of my relationships as well as my previous visits to Mexico, I was somewhat familiar with the Mexican culture and traditions, but I did have to adjust to some differences. After I arrived in Mexico, I wanted to dive in and immediately begin my research, but I quickly had to learn to be flexible and patient. Because of obligations in the United States, I was limited on time in Mexico and had a total of four months to do research. Obstacles presented themselves daily and I had to adjust to cultural differences such as the pace of life, and the understanding and use of time. Teachers, staff, and students at JLL often didn't show up to school or were late, which in turn affected scheduled meetings, interviews, and peer support group meetings. Since my research was conducted at one public middle school, my sample was limited, geographically and numerically.

It was also difficult to recruit participants for my research for several reasons. First, people were hesitant to speak about migrant family members because they feared it would lead to their deportation. For some, it was difficult to understand why I was doing this research, even with my

connections to the area and subject. There is also a stigma surrounding migration, and people were understandably hesitant and skeptical to participate in my research; therefore, it took me time to gain the trust of my participants and their parents.

As families navigate through the challenges of migration, especially in today's political climate, children need even more support. Although the peer support group has not continued beyond the time that I was in Mexico, relationships and friendships that I made convince me that students from migrant families could benefit from the Mexican school system being more systematic in addressing migration, an issue that is so huge and complex and affects so many of its students.

## **Chapter 5: Mexican Childhoods in Motion: Discussion and Implications**

Immigration is woven into the fabric of this nation's history, and children are an essential piece of that fabric. Whether they are on the move, or stay behind in the source community, children are impacted and shaped by this complex process, although they are often overlooked in migration literature. The absence of a parent can have negative effects on a child's psychological wellbeing and educational performance, and most Mexican public schools do not have the resources and teachers to deal with these issues. Peer support, as well as other positive relationships, has been shown to counter depressive symptoms and behavioral problems, promote confidence within social interactions, and provide emotional support to children (Allen et al. 2007, Wen and Lin 2012). Although parental migration can negatively impact children left behind, cross-border parenting, regular communication, and receiving remittances can help children find resilience and happiness through the disruptions and adversity that accompany migration.

### ***I. Migration in the School***

Migration is not something that is often discussed in the classrooms or taught in the Mexican public school curricula. There are many concerns surrounding this topic, which can be difficult to discuss due to their sensitive nature. In many cases, the migrant parent, or other family member, is

working in the United States without proper documentation. If that parent were to be deported if caught without papers, it could be financially devastating for the family left behind in Mexico. It is not an easy subject to discuss in settings outside the home, although most teachers agreed that it needs to be addressed in a school setting, either in classrooms and curriculum, or through a school counselor or peer support program.

During my research process, I interviewed fifteen teachers and faculty members from Escuela Secundaria J. Javier Lopez Lopez. When asked, “Is the social process of migration something that is discussed or taught in the curriculum or classroom setting?”, 12 out of 15 answered yes. The varying answers reflect the specific classes they taught. For example, the Art and Physical Education teachers did not teach or discuss migration in their classes, because they did not lecture at all in their classes. The children were either working on projects in Art class, or doing activities in P.E. The subject areas in which migration is ever formally discussed in JLL is Geography, Civics, Tutoria, a class about health and values.

*I talk about immigration in school because it's in my lesson planning. Most of the kids care so much because this is a state where people go to the United States, so lots of kids have family there and they want to know the legal ways of getting there. When I talk about immigration, some of the kids express their emotions because they are sad if their dad or mom or other family members are gone. – Ana, JLL teacher*

*We don't talk about immigration...It's something that is talked about in homes, with mothers, fathers, and children. –Juan, JLL teacher*

*Yes, it (migration) is talked about. We talk about the emotional changes with the students. In Civics, it's talked about in the curriculum in the books, if the parents are gone or have died. –Maritza, JLL teacher*

As migration continues to penetrate the daily lives of Mexican children, it is essential for schools and teachers to start and continue a dialogue of migration, both in the formal curriculum and in classroom discussions.

## ***II. The Disconnect between Lived Experiences of Migration and the Realities of the School System in Mexico***

While conducting participant observation and in-depth interviews at JLL, it became more apparent why Mexican public schools do not address issues concerning students from migrant families. This does not necessarily mean that it is not an important issue for schools and families, but there are several factors that keep parental migration issues at base priority in these schools. As seen in Figure 5., the state of Guanajuato has a high degree of out-migration, meaning that most of its citizens are familiar with the concept and implications of migration to the United States. It has become part of peoples' everyday lives, and is considered by many to simply be part of the "culture of migration" in Mexico (Cohen and Sirkeci 2011). Migration is so common that some of the students in the peer support group from JLL were only familiar with cross-border parenting from their fathers. The average number of years their fathers were gone was 8 years, with the lowest number

being 2 years and the highest being 15, and only 5 out of 13 fathers returned to Mexico, for short periods of time, since their initial departure to the United States. These numbers reflect the commonplace nature of migration in the community, and may help explain why migration is often not at the forefront of issues in schools. Alma, the dean of JLL, confessed that other issues, such as lack of food or shelter, child abuse, or drug and alcohol addictions often take priority.

*There are harder problems than immigration. Social problems, like addictions, abandoned kids, kids with no money...they need to be motivated. These students need support programs of other kinds. Their minds are contaminated. –Alma, Dean of JLL*

Many participants interviewed expressed that one of the main reasons their school is not capable of providing the necessary aid for students from migrant families is the lack of resources and finances. Public schools in Mexico are government funded, and most schools have only enough funding for the minimum number of teachers, with little or no money for extra services such as psychologists or counselors.

*In fact, we don't have this kind of service established, but when I worked in another school here in Guanajuato, there was a pilot project for a psychologist to be working with kids and general problems. It was ultimately denied by the Secretary of Guanajuato. Also, the government doesn't give us the resources to provide the students with a specialist like this. –Gabriel, Director of JLL*

While interviewing Alma, she made it clear that the school lacked the necessary resources and teachers to provide the extra support needed for



students from migrant families. There is a low teacher-student ratio, an average of 1 teacher per 50 students in this specific school, therefore many teachers do not have the time to speak individually with students.

*Migration is part of the culture...it depends on where you are at, if the teachers notice or care about problems. If they have 50 or 60 students, they might not have the time or resources to help. –Dr. Isabella Marcos, Linguistics professor at the University of Guanajuato*

*We need money. We need resources to update our building. It's an old building and it cracks and we need to repair it. We need computers, projectors, books, a psychologist, and a social worker. We need resources for students with disabilities. We need another prefecta. We need more teachers. –Alma, Dean of JLL*

*It would be great to have that kind of support program and a psychologist, but we don't have those kinds of resources. Also, it's difficult to follow those kinds of problems because there are so many students and many teachers are only here for an hour at a time and then they go teach at another school. – Tomas, JLL teacher*

During her interview, one participant explained why she chose to send her children to a private school, instead of public.

*Many factors made me think it was the best solution. First of all, I worked in private schools, so I know they offer more subjects. They go the extra mile to make sure the kids get a good education. I know that you need to improve your teaching every day, and sometimes the private schools will pay teachers to further their education and get higher degrees. They usually have fewer students in private schools, so I think the teachers have more time to give to each individual student. However, I grew up in a public institution. I saw the difference between both schools. My nephew attends a public school and I see many problems that my sister deals with...lots of students in each classroom, no respect for teachers. I know not all the schools are the same, I know that. However, the government provides lots of help to public institutions and private schools usually don't get any help. Many*

*public-school teachers know they get a paycheck and they no longer try to better themselves. –Elizabeth, translator, graduate student at University of Guanajuato*

When asked about her thoughts on support for students with migrant parents, one teacher expressed that there is an overall lack of concern on the teachers' part. This was a recurring theme that arose while I was conducting my fieldwork. Teaching in Mexico is a difficult job, highly bureaucratic, with institutional restraints. Many of the teachers that worked at JLL had additional jobs, teaching in other schools, and were overworked. Despite these challenging structural limitations, teaching positions in public schools are coveted and highly sought-after, because they are subsidized by the government, and therefore have a very low termination and turn-over rate. However, the difficulty of the job, combined with the job security and lack of performance-based review sometimes results in faculty burn-out, attitudes of resignation, cynicism, lack of enthusiasm or faith in their ability to effect change. Even though some of these broader structural forces may challenge individuals, most teachers were compassionate and concerned for the well-being of their students, as nearly all agreed that children from migrant families need extra support from schools.

### ***III. Effects of Parental Migration***

*It [parental migration] makes them very sad. All of them. Marco was only 4 when his dad left. He's been working in the United States for 8 years. Marco lives with his mom, and he works at a store after school. He cries every day and it makes me very sad. He is depressed... other students are sad too, but they have adapted. I talk with Marco every*

*day and try to help him. –Ana, JLL teacher*

*Jose is sad because his father was kidnapped 2 years ago. He was drug trafficking, and Jose's family hasn't heard from him since. – Ana, JLL teacher*

Separations caused by parental migration impact families, and especially children, permeating their school and home lives, emotions, and behaviors. The harsh realities of parental migration force thousands of Mexican children to deal with profoundly saddening and complex matters at a very young age. Through participant observation, interviews, and the peer support group, I was able to better understand the implications of parental migration in Mexican public schools.

During the adult interviews, when asked, “Do you see a change in behavior or academic work when a student’s parent migrates?”, 14 out of 15 answered yes.

*Yes, I notice that 90% of the students in this school that have family in the United States don't know due dates of assignments. They don't have limits. They don't have the guidance of their parents. They want to be free. They aren't respectful. – Luis, JLL teacher*

*I notice the difference in behavior...emotionally. A lot of times, these students are shy and sad, but it doesn't necessarily affect their work. – Martin, JLL teacher*

*Yes, of course. I notice that many of the students that have parents in the United States rebel. They don't have the control they need in their lives. It's difficult for kids who don't live with their parents and they show wrong behavior in class and school. –Daisy, JLL teacher*

*I notice emotional problems in these students, so I try to create different dynamics to help students take their mind off what they are feeling at that moment. I notice these students don't have discipline because it's necessary to have the example of their parents, or a strict hand. –Jorge, JLL teacher*

When I asked students that same question, 50% said that their father's absence affects their school work.

*I'm used to it, but I think it affects my academic work. If my dad was here, I might do better. I failed one year in school because I was worried about my dad in the United States. I didn't come to school, so I failed an entire year. – Sofia, JLL student*

*I feel terrible. I cry a lot. I don't get distracted in my academics when he is gone...I have the same grades, but my dad helps me with my homework when he is here. I feel more comfortable with him. –Sara, JLL student*

*I think it's different when my dad isn't here because I don't have his cariño (affection, love). –Samuel, JLL student*

*\*Samuel's father has been in the United States for 10 years (Samuel is 14). He stays in one country for a year and a half, then goes to the other country for a year and a half.*

*I do see a difference when he comes back here. My schoolwork is better. I feel happier when he is here, so my school work is better. Sometimes I feel sad because my dad is over there and I can't see him every day. I have some friends that get to see their dad every day. –Esperanza, JLL student*

*\*Esperanza's father has been going back and forth between Mexico and the United States for 15 years (Esperanza is 14). He visits Mexico every 2 years, for about 2 months at a time.*

90% of the teachers, and 50% of the students interviewed agreed that parental migration affects the children left behind, either emotionally, academically, or behaviorally. The physical and emotional distance between

a child and a migrant parent can create complicated transnational dynamics, and it is important for school systems to provide necessary support and care for students struggling with the impacts of an absent parent.

#### ***IV. Analysis of Peer Support Group***

During my preliminary visit to Mexico, the director of the school said that behavioral problems were an issue in the school for students from migrant families. Since positive social relations have been shown to counter behavioral problems or depressive symptoms among youth (Wen and Lin 2012), I developed the peer support group expecting to counter those issues, by providing students with space to build healthy connections with other children.

The last two questions of the adult interviews addressed support for migrant students and were very similar questions, with similar answers. When asked, “Do you think it would be beneficial for your school to have people or programs in place to help children cope with a parent’s absence?”, 14 out of 15 answered yes. When asked, “Do you think it would benefit students to have support groups with their peers whose parents have migrated?”, 14 out of 15 answered yes.

*Yes, of course. I’m positive it would be beneficial. Kids at this age have different kinds of feelings and might be going through changes in their lives, so if they had someone, an adult, to talk to or look up to, it might help them feel better, behave better, and grow up to be good people. – Antonio, JLL teacher*

*Yes. That will help increase our knowledge of the students. Maybe it will encourage the students. Even to have a program to help with emotional problems...they could talk to each other, find a solution for a problem, get together after school. It would be nice. They could say, 'I have other classmates that have the same problem as me.' It increases self-esteem. –Juan, JLL teacher*

*Yes, it would be nice to have a psychologist here, but since we don't have the resources, it would be good to have projects, videos, books, or materials that the teachers can show and help with those kids whose parents are in the United States. It would be good to offer a course for the teachers, to show them how to work with these students and help them. –Carlos, JLL teacher*

*It would be great to have a program to help students handle their problems. The specialist needs to know that the students have bad behavior and why they act out. Maybe this person could help the students understand why their parents migrate...to provide them with a better education. –Adrianna, JLL teacher*

*In fact, we don't have this kind of service establishes. But, when I worked in another school, here in Guanajuato, there was a pilot project for a psychologist to be working with the kids and with general problems. It was ultimately denied by the Secretary of Guanajuato. Also, the government doesn't give us the resources to provide the students with a specialist like this. If you have the opportunity to talk to your bosses, or immigration offices, we would love to start a program like that here. It is very important...and we need programs like that here. –Gabriel, Director of JLL*

*It would be great to have a program among students because it would make them feel like they aren't alone and they could find a friend that is living in the same situation as them. –Daisy, JLL teacher*

Emotional, social, and academic outcomes have been linked to peer support as well as teacher support (Roeser, Eccles, and Sameroff 2000), and over 90% of teachers agreed that a support program could benefit their

school. However, a common concern from the teachers and staff was that they did not have the time nor the resources to start and sustain a program, but they overwhelmingly believed in its importance.

Most students in the peer support group agreed that they had good relationships with teachers and other peers, yet none of them claimed to directly speak with teachers about the subject. As evidenced by interviews, many teachers in JLL empathize with these students and understand the struggles of migration. A peer support group could potentially bridge that gap of communication between teachers and students, giving the students the support and guidance they need.

The peer support group aimed to provide connections among children, which I believe it did, but quantifying data from the group, other than demographics, proved to be difficult. Every student in the peer support group shared their migration experience with me, and trusted me enough during the interview process to let me see their emotions, while I struggled to find comforting words. Even though the meetings were held during their lunchbreak, the students chose to keep coming back, week after week. They were there because they wanted to be.

The peer support group was unsustainable after I left Mexico, due to the structural challenges that left teachers without the time to facilitate. However, throughout the length of its existence, the students built trusting

relationships with one another, and friendships emerged as they shared stories and found comfort and solace through their peers.

## ***V. Resilience through Adversity***

At the end of each interview, I asked the student to generally express their feelings about their father migrating to the United States. That data was difficult to quantify, but 12 out of 13 students expressed negative feelings surrounding the topic of their father being gone. These answers ranged from sadness and missing their father, to anger and frustration. Yet, all student participants expressed a general happiness in life. This dichotomy may be attributed to regular communication and good relations with their migrant fathers. Twelve out of 13 students were in regular communication with their father, over the phone, at least once a week, and 2 out of 13 also used video chatting to communicate with their fathers. Cross-border parenting has become easier in some areas, as families have learned to utilize modern technology for easy video chatting, phone calls, and money transfers.

Receiving remittances from their father in the United States may also contribute to a child's resiliency and happiness. Remittances are a tangible element of transnational migration, revealing commitment to their family members in Mexico and facilitating a sense of familyhood across borders (Hershberg and Lykes 2016). Given the disruptions these families face, the



resiliency through communication, and emotional and financial support, is critical.

## ***VI. Future Implications***

Mexican migration to the United States has been on the decline, and with strict border laws and our current political climate, people are living in fear. Castañeda (2007) claims that increased border enforcement and domestic policies are making immigrants out of migrants, as people are having to choose a side of the border. This restricts the fluidity of migration, and separates families for longer periods of time, and even permanently. These physical and emotional separations impact everyone involved, including children left behind in the sending community. Any research on providing families or schools with practical tools to help children cope with an absent parent could be beneficial in countering the negative effects of parental migration.

There is limited research on children in migration, and the research that exists generally focuses on children in the United States, or children on the move (Ansell 2016; Camissa et al. 2009; Nazario 2007). There is less about those who remain in the source community. One possible direction for future study could focus on children from migrant families, as well as children from two-parent households, all within the same community, in order to provide a unique comparison. I had originally planned on doing this when I was in Mexico, but I was limited on time and unable to focus on

children from two-parent households. Another study could conduct a long-term, cross-cultural study of how children from other countries cope with parental migration, including whether and how schools support these children.

Mexican public schools lack the necessary funding and resources to sustain a peer support group for children from migrant families. One of the hardest parts of finishing my fieldwork was knowing that the group would not continue after I left, and that some of those children would not have the continued support they need. A highly beneficial future development could include the researcher working directly with the teachers, and ultimately creating a teacher-training program to help them better understand and attend to some of the issues that children go through when they live without a parent. This could possibly lead to creating a sustainable peer support group by recruiting volunteers to run the program. Another compelling study might explore how to address teacher burn-out caused by institutional restraints. Ultimately, my research highlights the importance of implementing a peer support group for children from migrant families. The need for more support, funding, and volunteers in Mexican public schools is greater than ever, and the possibilities for future research on this topic is seemingly never-ending and of utmost importance.

Whether it's seeing a loved one leave the country for work, receiving remittances to support those left behind, or communicating with migrants

abroad, migration is something that many of my participants confront on a daily basis. The effects of parental migration are deeply rooted in their lives, and previous research, as well as my own, shows the lack of support in Mexican public schools for children with migrant parent(s). This creates a need for child advocacy in Mexico. Children are always going to be an essential part of migration. There will continue to be transnational families, navigating the difficulties of cross-border parenting, and children will continue to be affected by these complex family dynamics. I argue that instituting peer support groups in Mexican public schools could benefit children from migrant families, by providing them with emotional support, positive social relationships, and helping them cope with the difficulties of parental migration.

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## **Appendix A: Interview Schedule (Adult)**

### **Part 1: Brief Interview**

- “Is the social process of migration something that is discussed/taught in the curriculum or classroom setting?”
- “Do you see a change in behavior or academic work when a student’s parent(s) migrate?”
- “Do you think it would be beneficial for your school to have people or programs in place to help children cope with a parent’s absence?”
- “Do you think it would benefit students to have support groups with their peers whose parents have migrated?”

### **Part 2: Follow-up**

- On question x, you answered, x. Can you elaborate on this?

### **Part 3: Additional Questions**

- Name:
- Age:
- Where did you grow up?
- Did you attend college? If yes, where?
- Did you grow up with both of your parents?
- Do you have any siblings?
- Do you have any children?
- What is your personal/professional 5-year plan?
- How long have you been teaching?

## **Appendix B: Interview Schedule (Student)**

1. Name:
2. Age:
3. Sex:
4. What is your living situation? Do you live with your mom, dad, or other guardian?
5. Do you have any siblings? If yes, how many? How old are they? Do they attend school? If yes, private or public?
6. Is your dad in the U.S. right now? How long has he been there? Does he come back to visit? If yes, how often and for how long?
7. What is your communication with your dad like? Do you talk on the phone, use web cam, or write letters? If yes, how often and for how long?
8. Why is your dad working in the U.S.? (I'm having difficulties wording this question because I phrased it differently, depending on the student, situation, etc...I often asked them if their dad is working in the U.S. to provide a better education for them...)
9. Do you see a difference in your academic work or school engagement because of your father's absence?
10. Do you feel as though you are in good health/have good nutrition? Do you bring food from home for lunch or do you buy your lunch here?
11. Does your mom work? If yes, where?
12. Do you work? If yes, where?
13. What is your supervision like at home?
14. Are you satisfied/content/happy in life?
15. What are your goals/aspirations in life?
16. Do you wish to attend college? If yes, where?
17. Do you have good relationships with your teachers and peers?
18. What is your favorite subject/class in school?
19. Do you feel like students or teachers treat you differently because your dad is in the U.S.?
20. Do you talk to your friends or teachers about your dad being in the U.S.?
21. What are your feelings about your dad being in the U.S.?
22. Do you ever see yourself visiting or living in the U.S.?



## Appendix C: Table 1 – Case Study Interview Data: Student Participants

Name	Age	Gender	Primary Caregiver	Absent Parent	Length of Absence (in years)	Absentee Parent Visits to Mexico	Communication w/Absent Parent	Type/Frequency of Communication	Are You Content/Happy in Life?	Good Relationships with Teachers/Peers	Is Primary Caregiver Employed?	Communication w/Teachers or Friends about Parental Migration
Sofia	14	F	Mother	Father	9	No	Yes	Phone, 1x week	Yes	Ok	Yes	No
Sara	14	F	Mother	Father	14	Yes	Yes	Phone, Every day	Yes	Ok	No	No
Gabriela	14	F	Mother	Father	12	No	No	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Maria	12	F	Mother	Father	2	No	Yes	Phone/Webcam, Every day	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Santiago	12	M	Mother	Father	2	No	Yes	Phone, 2x Week	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Isabella	13	F	Mother	Father	3	No	Yes	Phone, Every day	Yes	Yes	No	Yes (friend)
Victoria	14	F	Mother	Father	5	No	Yes	Phone/Webcam, Every day	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Esperanza	14	F	Mother	Father	15	Yes	Yes	Phone, 1x Week	Yes	Yes	No	Yes (friend)
Alejandro	14	M	Mother	Father	10	Yes	Yes	Phone, 2-3x Week	Yes	Yes	No	Yes (friend)
Samuel	14	M	Mother	Father	10	Yes	Yes	Phone, Every day	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nicolas	16	M	Mother	Father	10	No	Yes	Phone, 1x Week	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Mateo	14	M	Mother	Father	14	Yes	Yes	Phone, Every day	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (friend)
Lucas	13	M	Mother	Father	Unkn.	No	Yes	Phone, 2-3x Month	Yes	Teachers Yes, Peers No	No	Yes (friend)

**Appendix D: Table 2 – Case Study Interview Data: JLL Staff**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Occupation at J.L.L.</b>	<b>Years at J.L.L.</b>	<b>Question 1</b>	<b>Question 2</b>	<b>Question 3</b>	<b>Question 4</b>
Maritza	56	F	Teacher: Civics	8	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Daisy	65	F	Teacher: Geography, History	42	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Paula	80	F	Teacher: Physics, Biology, Chemistry	56	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tomas	55	M	Teacher: Biology, Chemistry, Physics, History	29	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Martin	45	M	Teacher: Spanish, Civics	11	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Carlos	46	M	Teacher: Math, Civics	23	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Luis	55	M	Teacher: Science, Biology, Chemistry	33	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ana	39	F	Teacher: Social Studies	6	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Antonio	37	M	Teacher: Spanish, Geography	16	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Benjamin	53	M	Teacher: Music/Art	30	Yes	No*	Yes	Yes
Adrianna	29	F	Teacher: History, Civics, Tutoria	7	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Jorge	50	M	Teacher: Physical Education	28	No**	Yes	Yes	Yes
Alma	40	F	Dean (Prefecta)	14	Yes	Yes	No	No
Juan	27	M	Teacher: English	Unkn.	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

## Appendix E: Interview Informed Consent (Adult)

A research project on migration in Mexican school settings is being conducted by Tiffini Ayala in the Department of Anthropology at Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA. The purpose of the study is to understand how the social process of migration is addressed in Mexican school settings (if at all), and to better understand how schools and educators can help children cope with transnational parenting and the changes that accompany the process.

You are being asked to take part in this study by filling out a short questionnaire, and participating in an audiotaped interview related to parental migration and the associated effects on students. One possible benefit may be a better understanding of the effects parental migration has on children in school. Also, this research could possibly lead to the development of formal assistance programs, to provide social, emotional, and academic support for students with absentee parent(s).

Please know that you are not required to participate in this research and you may discontinue your participation at any time without loss of benefits. You may also choose not to answer specific questions if you would prefer not to. Your participation will involve approximately one hour.

All information is confidential. Signed consent forms and questionnaires will be kept in a locked cabinet separate from the interview notes and audiotapes. Your name will not be associated with any of your responses at anytime.

If you have questions regarding this research project or would like to receive further information or the results of this study, please contact Tiffini Ayala at (775) 397-1286, [ayalat@students.wwu.edu](mailto:ayalat@students.wwu.edu), or Dr. James Loucky, Faculty Advisor, at (360) 650-3615, [James.Loucky@wwu.edu](mailto:James.Loucky@wwu.edu). If you have questions or concerns regarding the manner in which the study is conducted, you may contact Janai Symons, of the Western Washington University Human Subjects Committee, at (360) 650-3082, [Janai.Symons@wwu.edu](mailto:Janai.Symons@wwu.edu).

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research project please indicate your agreement by signing below. Please retain a copy of this consent form for your reference, and thank you for your participation.

\*\*\*\*\*

**I have read the above description and agree to participate in this study.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's PRINTED NAME

NOTE: Please sign both copies of the form and retain the copy marked "Participant."

## Appendix F: Interview Informed Consent (Student)

### Consentimiento Para Entrevista Informada      **\*\*PARTICIPANTE**

Tiffini Ayala está llevando a cabo un proyecto de investigación para el Departamento de Antropología en la Universidad de Western Washington, Bellingham, WA, USA, acerca de la migración en el entorno escolar mexicano. El propósito de este estudio es para entender cómo se aborda el proceso social de la migración en el entorno escolar mexicano (si acaso), y para entender cómo pueden las escuelas y educadores ayudar mejor a los niños a enfrentar la paternidad transnacional y los cambios que acompañan el proceso.

Estamos pidiendo que participe en este estudio por medio de contestar un cuestionario breve, y participar en una entrevista relacionada con la migración parental y los efectos en los estudiantes. Un posible beneficio sería una mejor comprensión de los efectos que la migración parental tiene en los niños que están en la escuela. Además, es posible que esta investigación conduzca a un desarrollo de programas de asistencia formal que proveen apoyo social, emocional, y académico a los estudiantes con padres ausentes.

Por favor, sepa que no se le requiere participar en esta investigación, y si participa, puede discontinuar en cualquier momento sin pérdida alguna de los beneficios. También puede decidir si contesta, o no contesta, preguntas específicas. Su participación durara aproximadamente una hora.

Toda la información es confidencial. Los formularios de consentimiento firmados se guardaran cerrados con llave y separados de los cuestionarios. Su nombre no se asociara con ninguna de sus respuestas en ningún momento.

Si tiene preguntas sobre este proyecto de investigación, o desea recibir más información, o recibir los resultados de este estudio, por favor póngase en contacto con Tiffini Ayala al (775) 397-1286, [ayalat@students.wvu.edu](mailto:ayalat@students.wvu.edu), o con el Dr. James Loucky, Asesor de la Facultad, al (360) 650-3615, [James.Loucky@wvu.edu](mailto:James.Loucky@wvu.edu). Si usted tiene preguntas o preocupaciones acerca de la manera en que se realiza este estudio, puede comunicarse con Janai Symons, de la Universidad de Western Washington, a (360) 650-3082, [Janai.Symons@wvu.edu](mailto:Janai.Symons@wvu.edu).

Si usted acepta participar voluntariamente en este proyecto de investigación, por favor indique su acuerdo al firmar a continuación. Por favor conserve una copia de este formulario de consentimiento para su referencia y gracias por su participación.

\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*

**He leído la información anterior y estoy de acuerdo con participar en este estudio:**

☐ **Estoy de acuerdo en participar**      ☐ **No Estoy de acuerdo en participar**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Firma de los padres o tutores de los participantes**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Fecha**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Nombre impreso de los padres o tutores de los participantes**

**He leído la información anterior y estoy de acuerdo con participar en este estudio:**

☐ **Estoy de acuerdo en participar**      ☐ **No Estoy de acuerdo en participar**

## Appendix F: Interview Informed Consent (Student)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma de los alumnos participantes

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

\_\_\_\_\_  
Nombre impreso de los alumnos participantes

\_\_\_ Estoy enterada y autorizo la participación de mi hijo(a) en esta investigación

\_\_\_ No autorizo la participación de mi hijo(a) en esta investigación

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma de los padres o tutores

NOTA: Favor de firmar las 2 copias del formulario y guardar para usted la copia marcada "Participante."

### **Permiso Para Publicación de Foto**

Doy permiso para que imágenes de mi hijo(a), capturadas a través de fotos o cámara digital, se usen exclusivamente para fines de la investigación de Tiffini Ayala (un estudiante en la Universidad de Western Washington) para material promocional y publicaciones, y renuncio a cualquier derecho de indemnización, o de la propiedad misma.

Nombre del Participante (letra de molde): \_\_\_\_\_

Edad: \_\_\_\_\_

Nombre del Padre/Guardián (letra de molde): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma del Padre o Guardián:

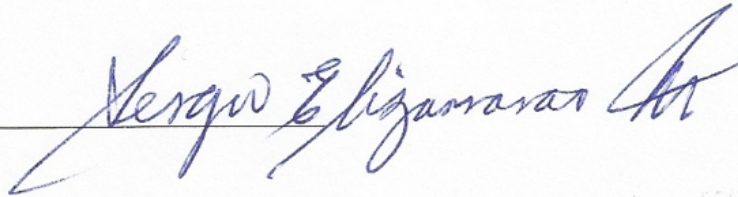
\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix G: JLL Approval of Research

To Whom It May Concern and WWU:

I have agreed to allow Tiffini Ayala, a graduate student in the Anthropology Department at Western Washington University, to conduct her thesis research at my school in the fall of 2012. We look forward to building a partnership with Tiffini and working with her throughout her research.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Sergio Elizarraras", is written over a horizontal line.

April 23, 2012

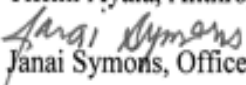


SECRETARIA DE EDUCACION  
GUANAJUATO  
ESCUELA SECUNDARIA  
"J. JESÚS LÓPEZ LÓPEZ"  
C.C.T. 11EES0029Z  
MORELÓN, GTO.

## Appendix H: IRB Approval

### WESTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY Office of Research and Sponsored Programs

#### MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Tiffini Ayala, Anthropology Department  
**FROM:**  Janai Symons, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  
**DATE:** 8/13//2012  
**SUBJECT:** Human Subjects Review – Exemption Research Approval

Thank you for submitting a research protocol regarding your human subject research EX13-003 “A Nation Away: Coping With Parental Migration in Mexican School Settings”, for review by the Human Subjects Review Committee (HSRC).

*Approval:* The HSRC has reviewed the materials you submitted and found the project described falls into Category #2: research involving survey or interview procedures. Although the research qualifies for exempt status, the investigators still have a responsibility to protect the rights and welfare of their subjects, and are expected to conduct their research in accordance with the ethical principles of Justice, Beneficence, and Respect for Persons, as described in the Belmont Report, as well as with state and local institutional policy. All students and investigators collecting or analyzing data must be qualified and appropriately trained in research methods and responsible conduct of research.

*Determination Period:* An exempt determination is valid for five years from the date of the determination, as long as the nature of the research activity remains the same. If the involvement of human subjects changes over the course of the study in a way that would increase risks, please submit a revised protocol.

*Problems:* If issues should arise during the conduct of the research, such as unanticipated problems that may increase the risk to the human subjects and change the category of review, notify the Research Compliance Officer promptly. Any complaints from subjects pertaining to the risk and benefits of the research must be reported to the Research Compliance Officer.

If you have any questions, feel free to email me at [janai.symons@wwu.edu](mailto:janai.symons@wwu.edu).

Cc: James Loucky  
Daniel Boxberger