

BEST PRACTICES AND BIGGEST OBSTACLES IN EDUCATING HISPANIC MIGRANT  
STUDENTS

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## ABSTRACT

Hispanics are now the largest minority ethnic group in the United States. Many Hispanics come to this country seeking migrant employment, moving from place to place, job to job. Unfortunately, children of Hispanic migrants often encounter great difficulties in our educational settings. Likewise, American educators generally experience problems in offering quality education to Hispanic migrant students. Research has outlined the factors that are the greatest barriers to educating Hispanic migrant students. The broad categories of obstacles as defined by literature are language, culture, lack of parental involvement, and mobility. Educators of these students are better prepared to instruct them when these obstacles are taken into consideration and addressed with a number of changes in both policies and instructional practices.

This study focused on schools within two school systems in rural southeastern North Carolina. This research revealed the extent to which teachers recognized and experienced obstacles to their instruction of Hispanic migrant students. The study also identified the current practices teachers found to be effective as well as their recommendations for changes for improvement. Results here support the conclusions that there are several factors that contribute toward migrant educational difficulties, the most overwhelming of which is the language barrier. While many practices that literature recommends to combat the obstacles of Hispanic migrant education were found to be in place and effective, other suggestions for improvement have not been implemented.

Specific recommendations for change have been made based on the findings of both the current literature and the research conducted.

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my former and current students of East Columbus High School in Lake Waccamaw, North Carolina. They enrich my life, both professionally and personally, more than they will ever know.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Background

As of the year 2002, Hispanics are the largest minority in the United States according to the U.S. Census Bureau (McKinnon, 2003). This milestone was reached several years sooner than had been anticipated. With this dramatic increase in our Hispanic population, the country is faced with several new and growing challenges as well as opportunities for enrichment. Since today's youth will hopefully be tomorrow's leaders and productive, responsible citizens, it is critical that education be considered as the most important of these challenges and opportunities to be addressed. Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress indicate that Latino students are noticeably behind white, non-Latino students as early as the fourth grade and this discrepancy builds through the remainder of elementary and secondary school years (Duran, Escobar, & Wakin, 1997). According to the American Educational Research Association, by the end of high school, students who started school knowing little or no English trail far behind native English speakers on achievement tests. They typically score in the 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> percentile on English-language versions of national standardized tests, such as the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, the Stanford Achievement Test-9<sup>th</sup> Edition, and the TerraNova edition of the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (Viadero, 2001). Figures such as these are sad indicators of the urgent need to examine and restructure aspects of education for Hispanic students.

The Hispanic population in our country is comprised of people from various Spanish-speaking countries and, of course, their progeny. A great percentage of the Hispanic population, however, is made up of Hispanic migrant workers, the majority of whom are of Mexican and Central American origin. These Hispanic migrant workers are unique in many aspects of their lives. While many of the barriers with which they are faced are the same for most Hispanics in

our country, others are issues that are unique to their specific culture and lifestyle. Likewise, educators working with Hispanic migrant children are doubly challenged in working to deal with those same issues, as well as others, in order to educate them. The major obstacles encountered in educating these migrant students will be researched and examined in detail as a part of this paper. A brief overview is included here as a basis for the research that follows.

### Overview of Problem and Research

Many Hispanics in this country speak only Spanish; consequently, their children are raised in Spanish-speaking environments with very little exposure to English. In 2001, there were 3,598,451 Spanish-speaking Limited English Proficient (LEP) students enrolled in our country's schools (Kindler, 2002). Bearing in mind this astounding figure, the most obvious obstacle related to the education of Hispanic migrant children is that of language. The methods by which schools deal with the language barrier vary throughout the country, even from school to school. Generally, there is a lack of effective bilingual and ESL programs in place to serve Spanish-speaking students. Also, bilingualism is often treated as a liability in the U.S. (President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, 1996). School funding at all levels and lack of specialized training of school personnel also often contribute to the problems associated with language. Children, parents, and educators struggling with communication difficulties are then faced with various other issues that arise related to the language problem.

While the language barrier is the most apparent of the problems associated with educating Hispanic migrant students, there are many other issues that also present major challenges. Difference in culture represents another of these challenges. All groups of people

have their own cultures. Culture may be linked to ethnicity, nationality, socio-economic level, and even geography. Hispanic migrant workers generally hail from Mexico, although others may be of other origins such as Central American (El Salvador, Guatemala). They, of course, have the culture that they share with all others from their respective countries. In addition, they have a culture that is unique to their migrant lifestyle and that is related to their educational and economic backgrounds. Their complex culture presents our country's educators with a variety of unfamiliar circumstances, ranging from simple behaviors to fundamental beliefs.

Yet another obstacle facing educators of Hispanic migrant children is the lack of involvement of many migrant parents in their children's education. Although language and culture are two of several justifiable contributors to this unfortunate behavior, typical lack of parental involvement is truly a barrier in its own right and presents significant difficulties for both teachers and students.

The very nature of being migrant, or migratory, presents an additional entirely different problem for the education of children. Under the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994, *migrant students* are the children of workers who move with their families to obtain seasonal or temporary work in agriculture, fishing or factories (Green, 2003). Further, being categorized as migrant indicates that the children's families have moved from one school district to another within the preceding 36 months (Gonzalez, 1998). Migrant students typically start school late, leave school early, and move repeatedly during the school year. It is estimated that migrant students lose up to two weeks of school per move (Romanowski, 2002). As many as 25 percent of migrant students enroll in school more than 30 days after the new school year begins (Research Triangle Institute as cited in Romanowski, 2002). There are obviously many negative academic effects of such occurrences, not the least of which are students being enrolled below

grade level, high numbers of drop outs among migrant students, and poor mastery of academic material. Although not *all* migrant workers are Hispanic, the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS) conducted by the Department of Labor in 1998 showed that Spanish was the native language for 84% of farm workers (Huang, 2002). For this large number of migrant children who are Hispanic, coupling their migratory lifestyle with differences in language and culture equates to even greater difficulties in an educational setting.

Typically, Hispanic migrant workers come from very poor economic backgrounds and have fairly low levels of education and a low rate of literacy even in Spanish. For their children, these factors may often contribute to circumstances such as inadequate healthcare, poor nutrition, lack of transportation, and low participation in pre-school programs. All of these circumstances mean more obstacles for both migrant children and the education system. Just as detrimental may be the discrimination and social isolation that children with these types of backgrounds often face in school and society as a whole. It is clear that the obstacles that migrant families encounter and the challenges educators confront in working with them are numerous and are all intertwined. One cannot, for example, separate lack of parental involvement from the language barrier or from the lack of cultural understanding; each factor influences others.

One of the purposes of this study is to identify and examine the greatest obstacles in educating Spanish-speaking migrant children. The review of literature will look at these obstacles from the perspectives of all major parties involved: students, educators, and parents. The research study will focus on the greatest barriers and best practices in migrant student education in general as viewed by educators in a specific geographic region. In addition, as the second purpose of this paper, both the review of literature and the data collection will attempt to determine the best practices currently *in place* for meeting the needs of migrant students in the

educational setting. The data collection will be specifically limited to education of migrant students in agricultural regions of North Carolina. While some obstacles characterize virtually *all* Hispanic migrant children, others vary depending on the geographic region of the United States they inhabit. School systems in states such as Texas and California, with the highest numbers of Hispanic migrants, obviously have programs in place for working with migrant students that are far different from those of states with fewer numbers of migrants and fewer resources. The practices that such school systems would characterize as best and most worthwhile, may likely not be feasible or practical in many areas of North Carolina. Questions to be addressed in this study are: *1) What do educators feel are the biggest obstacles in the education of Hispanic migrant students in specific agricultural areas of North Carolina?, 2) What do educators in those regions feel are the best practices currently in place for educating Hispanic migrant students?, and 3) What practices/changes do these educators believe should take place in order to better enable them to educate Hispanic migrant students?*

As previously addressed, both the literature and research will support the assertion that there are numerous factors that contribute to difficulties in educating Hispanic migrant youth. Many of the contributing factors are overlapping and have impact on each other. It is anticipated that currently implemented best practices indicated by educators in the field will likely include the use of Spanish during instruction, training for school personnel in ESL strategies as well as cultural awareness, role-playing, hands-on and real-life activities, community and parental involvement, and an accepting and non-threatening instructional environment.

## Clarification of Topic-Specific Terms

The following definitions and explanations are being provided for vocabulary and acronyms that will be referenced repeatedly throughout this paper:

*ELL* English Language Learner

*ESL* English as a Second Language

*Hispanic* person from or having ancestry in a Spanish-speaking country

*Latino* person from or having ancestry in a country whose language is derived from Latin  
(Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Rumanian, French)

*LEP* Limited English Proficient

*\*Primary, Native, First Language* are all interchangeable terms.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The following review of literature will serve to provide a basis of support for the necessity for a study such as this. The selected literature provides both statistical and theoretical information about the greatest barriers to effective Hispanic migrant student education. Each barrier will be explained along with other problems that are often associated with or attributed to that barrier. After each barrier or obstacle is identified and discussed, there will be an examination of teaching strategies and practices currently in place to combat the barrier as well as any other solutions that are recommended in the literature.

### Troubling Beginnings for Hispanic Migrant Education

According to a 1999-2000 summary report of a national survey about LEP students, the limited English proficient enrollment for the nation is principally concentrated in the early elementary grades, with nearly half (47%) of all LEP students enrolled in grades K through 3 (Kindler, 2002). Conversely, Hispanic children are *under*-represented in quality pre-school programs. According to a 1996 governmental report on Hispanic American Education, less than 15 percent of all Hispanic Americans participate in pre-school programs, though such programs have been proven to be high predictors of educational attainment and research has shown that a quality preschool experience is an important indicator of student success. Pre-primary schooling prepares children for a solid elementary education by teaching skills for learning and socialization (President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, 1996). The same report indicates that low-income Hispanic parents often believe that their home environments are better for their children than programs like Head Start, because

many early childhood services are not prepared to deal with the linguistic and cultural diversity of their children. With LEP students filling elementary classrooms and very few of them having had any pre-school experience, they are already beginning their education with a great disadvantage compared to many of their non-Hispanic, non-LEP classmates. This disadvantage is evidenced by data from NAEP indicating that by age nine, Hispanic American students lag behind in reading, mathematics, and science proficiency (President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, 1996).

With such disadvantages present as many Hispanic migrant children begin their education, the literature review will now turn to address what is clearly a great need-- identifying and examining educational problems that these children will likely encounter later on and proposing methods for minimizing or eliminating each.

#### Obstacle One: Language

One of the most fundamental yet formidable contributors to the overall poor academic performance of Hispanic migrant children is that of language. Most classroom instruction in the United States is done in English; so, many migrant students do not speak the language in which they are instructed because their native language is Spanish. Inability to speak the language of instruction presents more than just basic communication and information difficulties. A 1995 report by the U.S. Department of Education discusses some of the more complex barriers associated with educating linguistically diverse students. It indicates that LEP students' lack of English fluency may make it especially difficult for them to acquire skills that rely on different kinds of background information than what they possess as well as detailed knowledge of syntax. The report goes on to explain that because their body of experience occurs in another language,

LEP students have no mental word bank to refer to for English; therefore, neither writing nor reading necessarily provides the same learning resources to LEP students that it provides to others (Office of Bilingual and Minority Language Affairs, 1995). Progress in core subjects may certainly be hindered by this lack of learning resources. Author Garcia contends that the presence of unknown vocabulary in tests is a large factor affecting the performance of Spanish speaking students (Garcia as cited in Hornberger, Harsch & Evans, 1999). A similar problem is discussed by educational researchers who assert that even when children seem to understand a second language, they may not have mastered more complex uses that incorporate content knowledge in different subjects (August & Hakuta as cited in Reguero de Atilas & Allexaht-Snider, 2002). One author explains that students can attain proficiency in conversational English in one or two years; however, conversational English differs greatly from classroom English. Classroom English includes the skills needed to understand instruction and textbooks as well as the ability to define concepts and terms. Classroom English is much more complex than conversational English, with fewer visual or contextual clues, and the level of difficulty increases with grade level. For these reasons, it takes much more time for students to become proficient in classroom English (Wrigley, 2001). Unfamiliarity with levels and types of language acquisition may explain why educators often place LEP students into English-instructed academic settings, believing that they should be able to succeed because they are able “speak” English.

In addition to problems associated with comprehension, lack of instruction in children’s native language can promote low self-esteem. According to Janie Flores, former migrant worker and current director of a California migrant education program, “You just can’t separate language from identity. When we tell these students that the language they speak isn’t good enough, then what are we telling them about themselves?” (Belton, 2000, para.9) When

children feel that they must hide parts of themselves while at school or feel compelled to exchange their own language and culture with that of the majority, they may feel alienated or marginalized (Gibson & Bejinez, 2002). Another author, Hispanic himself, goes on to contend that insisting that students assimilate into monolingual or monocultural types of programs, may fundamentally damage not only their self-esteem, but their identity in the Latino community (Jimenez, 2001). This effect may become exacerbated by socio-economic conditions. When large numbers of language minority students are economically disadvantaged and the school environment portrays the minority language as problematic with speaking English as the way to be “normal”, students may become alienated from their families (Wong Fillmore, 1991a and 1991b). They may reject their native language - often the only language that their parents speak and along with it, their parents’ guidance and opinions (Office of Bilingual and Minority Language Affairs, 1995). Relationships with family are not the only ones that may be affected by language barriers. Language differences among school children often hamper their ability to engage each other on an equal basis, thereby emphasizing the disparities. The linguistic status differential in dual language situations can often foster an “us and them” relationship” (Brunn, 1999).

The language barrier creates additional problems that go beyond communication, comprehension, and relationship tensions. Teachers often group (migrant) students with slow learners, hindering their academic development and self-esteem (Trotter, 1992). When a student is given a test in a language in which he is not proficient, his abilities may be underestimated, and assignment to a lower educational track may result (August & Hakuta as cited in Hornberger, Harsch & Evans, 1999). In Brunn’s study, it was reported that one teacher working with Mexican migrant students often referred them to the special education program if

they had difficulty learning English (Brunn, 1999). Unfortunately, referrals such as those are not uncommon. A student certainly cannot fulfill his academic potential when he is not challenged in the classroom and is erroneously grouped beneath his academic abilities. According to a report from Educational Testing Services, tracking has had a negative impact that is directed mainly toward Hispanic and African American students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Valencia, 1997).

In some ways, the language barrier may be more challenging for rural school districts and for schools with low numbers of Spanish speaking students. Schools with only a few LEP students are under the same federal obligation to provide them with a program to learn English as districts with high numbers (Zehr, 2001). Unfortunately, federal grant programs for ESL students do not make money available to districts with very low numbers of such students, so there is very little financial support for regular classroom teachers with just a few students learning English (Zehr, 2001). Also, rural districts are less likely than many urban ones to have qualified ESL teachers, the finances to train them, or the policies to make adjustments for ESL students, including the application of teaching methods for diverse students (Berube as cited in Zehr, 2001).

### Breaking Down the Language Barrier

Fortunately, research and literature clearly provide specific ideas and recommendations to effectively break down the language barrier in order to educate language minority students, including Hispanic migrant children. Overwhelmingly, researchers agree that some instruction and support in the children's primary language, Spanish, is extremely beneficial to their academic success. Both Cummins (1991) and Willig (1985) provide overviews of studies

showing that LEP students make more rapid progress in all general subjects when instruction is provided in their native language. A U.S. Department of Public Education's report on bilingual education states that, "Language development in the primary language supports students' overall cognitive growth, connections with intimate community, and self-esteem. It appears to provide a strong foundation for second language acquisition," (Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs, p. 3, 1995 fix citation). Research has even indicated that children who arrive in the United States from Mexico with a strong foundation in their native language, are more successful in learning English than Mexican American children born in the U.S. (Montavon & Kinser, 1996).

Representative literature explains specific reasons for the use of primary language in instruction. The Intercultural Development Research Association further advocates the need for primary language use in education, indicating that providing support in the native language through fifth grade yields students who are more likely to: score higher on standardized tests, acquire a second language more easily and effectively, acquire the English phonemic system, and graduate from high school (Thomas and Collier's study as cited in Gonzalez, 1998). This point is reiterated by supporters of bilingual education theory, contending that language minority students are best served in programs that provide academic instruction in *their native language* while providing English instruction (Goldenberg, 1996). As expressed by two authors regarding educating Mexican immigrant children, encouraging children to maintain their first language is a means for supporting the development of their second language (Reguero de Atilas & Allexaht-Snider, 2002). Simply attempting to offer instruction in English with no specialized strategies or support in Spanish has been shown to be much less successful than the inclusion of such accommodations. Data from a study published in the *Bilingual Research Journal* (1999)

demonstrated that ELL students with the lowest understanding of English were failing in classrooms where English was the only language for instruction; however, in classes where both English *and* Spanish were used for instruction, ELL students felt more comfortable and made better progress in acquiring content area knowledge than their peers. “They used their abilities in Spanish to help make sense of the new language and the unfamiliar content...” (Brunn, p.339, 1999 fix citation). Another study that followed the academic progress of language minority students resulted in similar findings. Non-English speakers whose instruction is in English rather than their primary language, usually take 7 to 10 years to reach grade-level performance. Students receiving high-quality bilingual instruction usually take 4 to 7 years to reach native-speaker performance levels (Thomas & Collier as cited in Green, 2003.) The same study found that its findings were not negatively affected by background variables such as socioeconomic status.

As two educational authors explain, bilingual education in the U. S. is quite controversial with many educators, parents, and lawmakers being of the belief that all students should quickly be placed into English-only classes. Their contention is that with such great exposure to English, the children will learn it more quickly. Thus, they often tend to ignore research and, therefore, do not understand the need for native-language instruction (Montavon & Kinser, 1996). For these reasons, schools and school districts frequently provide programs that do not subscribe to the idea of native language support and instruction. ESL pullout programs are the most well known example of such programs. In pullout programs, students leave their regular classrooms for a period of time, sometimes daily, sometimes less frequently, to receive instruction in English; they generally receive no academic instruction in their native language (McKeon, 1987, Rennie, 1993, and Viadero, 2001). Researchers in a federally funded project tracked the

progress of ESL students in various types of programs. They judged the ESL pullout programs to be the least effective type, although it is the most commonly used in schools (Viadero, 2001). According to another report, many schools with limited resources use the ESL pullout programs and, although they are the most prevalent form of ESL instruction, they are generally inadequate and may hinder students from reaping the academic benefits of being in a regular classroom (Hornberger, Harsch, & Evans, 1999).

With indicators that primary language support is beneficial and that sole English instruction and the commonplace ESL pullout programs often are *not* beneficial, it is necessary to examine alternatives that are feasible for a variety schools and districts. Wealthy districts, urban districts, and those with high numbers of Spanish speaking students may be able to provide native language instruction and resources more easily than some other regions. Throughout the entire nation, there is a shortage of quality bilingual teachers. In the year 2000, the National Association of Bilingual Education estimated that the U.S. needed more than 250,000 additional certified bilingual teachers than were currently available (Short and Boyson as cited in Green, 2003). The issuance of alternative certificates to professionals from other fields of work is one manner in which some states are making an effort to overcome the critical need for bilingual teachers (Hornberger, Harsch & Evans, 1999).

In an effort to provide native language support, schools without bilingual teachers sometimes opt to enlist the help of those from outside the educational setting. As suggested in a U.S. Department of Education's report of model strategies, bilingual parent volunteers and teacher assistants can greatly enhance students' comprehension and facilitate general language development when lessons must be presented in English (Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs, 1995). Other authors and researchers specifically suggest that

parents or other community volunteers assist language minority migrant students with literature comprehension. The suggestion is that the bilingual volunteers read aloud or tape-record literary pieces in Spanish (Whittaker & Salend, 1997). In a study done on the absence of language policy in regard to Mexican migrant students, one teacher shared the successes experienced when she made use of a Spanish-speaking volunteer in her classroom. The Mexican parent volunteer provided assistance by explaining information to the students in Spanish and translating tests (Brunn, 1999).

Even when bilingual teachers and volunteers are not readily available, other strategies to provide Spanish language support and a comfortable environment are strongly recommended. These strategies often involve making use of the written language. Providing visible signs of children's native language can include labeling class objects in Spanish and incorporating authentic materials in Spanish in the classroom (Reguero de Atilas & Allexaht-Snyder, 2002). This idea can be extended beyond classroom walls by labeling areas around the school in Spanish, using multilingual signs and bulletin boards, and displaying student work in Spanish (Foulks, Garcia & Malkin, and Salend as cited in Whittaker & Salend, 1997). Other research points to these same strategies as well as other specific examples; among them is the idea of teachers developing bilingual alphabet books or other meaningful bilingual materials for their classes (Brunn & Delany-Barmann, 2001). Ensuring that schools and public libraries offer bilingual and Spanish books may take native language support beyond the parameters of the school and into migrant homes by promoting family reading (Martinez & Velazquez, 2000).

Regardless of whether schools provide Spanish support to their Hispanic migrant students, literature overwhelmingly demonstrates that there are many other teaching practices that are often beneficial to their academic progress. Some are strategies geared more toward

ESL instruction while others are typical of general instruction, but *all* are recommended to enhance the regular classroom experience of language minority migrant students. Cooperative teaching and learning activities are means for providing excellent opportunities for academic success, language practice, and interaction for these students (Romanowski, 2000, Villarreal & Revilla, 1998, Reguero de Atilas & Allexaht-Snyder, 2002, Rennie, 1993, and Lindholm, 1990). As some literature on educating migrant students explains, certain groups of minority students, including Mexican Americans, often prove to be particularly successful in cooperative learning situations. Due to their strong affinity for familial relationships, they are likely to cooperate well and may tend to favor group success over individual recognition (Platt & Cranston-Gingras, 1991). Wrigley (2001) offers a variation on this idea, suggesting that ESL students be paired with another student who can help check their comprehension and monitor their progress. Visual aids and other means of non-verbal communication such as pictures, demonstrations, graphic organizers, total physical response as well as hands-on activities, field trips, and role-playing (Villarreal & Revilla, 1998, Office of Bilingual and Minority and Language Affairs, 1995, and Reguero de Atilas & Allexaht-Snyder, 2002) are all considered to be among the better activities for educating Hispanic minority children. Other research offers the suggestions of opportunities for self-expression such as drawing, making a group mural, and singing, among other possibilities, as strategies for instruction from which many language building activities can stem (Montavon & Kinser, 1996). Along the same lines, incorporation of physical gestures, movements, manipulatives, and other non-written instructional methods that make use of more than one sense, can also facilitate language learning and academic progress (Maldonado-Colon as cited in Whittaker & Salend, 1997). Simply being aware of one's own language use can be useful for teachers. For example, students may be more likely to understand and respond if

teachers attempt to limit the length of their utterances, keep vocabulary simple, refrain from the use of idioms, speak clearly, rephrase, and employ repetition while modeling (Whittaker & Salend, 1997 and Reguero de Atilas & Allexaht-Snider, 2002).

Researchers also make some other recommendations for language learners that may be applied to almost any classroom with a variety of students. These include creating interesting lessons and encouraging student active participation (Norris-Holt, 2001 and Brunn & Delany-Barmann, 2001), understanding the language needs of students and planning explicitly to meet those needs, as well as assessing comprehension (Echevarria & Goldenberg, 1999). Certainly, schools and districts with ESL students should always make the best use of their resources and tailor their programs to meet their students' linguistic, academic, and affective needs (McKeon, 1987). Ideally, teachers would be trained in the skills and knowledge to deal with multicultural and language minority students (President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, 1996). An example of this type of effort can be seen in Dade County, Florida, where the school district requires all teachers with LEP students to take courses in ESL strategies (Office of Bilingual and Minority Language Affairs, 1995). Similarly, researchers studying in a small, rural Illinois school district concluded, among other things, that in-service training should be considered for faculty in both sociocultural and language acquisition issues (Brunn & Delany-Barmann, 2001). Coballes-Vega echoes the critical need for the incorporation of information about language acquisition as well as effective teacher practices into lesson planning when teaching native Spanish speakers. Additionally, she stresses the need for teachers to be familiar with their specific students' language usage when developing classroom activities for them (Coballes-Vega, 1992). A South Carolina researcher indicates that, because they are aware that nearly 50% of non-English-speaking Hispanics will drop out of high school, many

perspective teachers are also interested in preparing to work with LEP students by pursuing a minor in Spanish or at least learning some basic Spanish vocabulary before entering the classroom (Quintelli-Neary, 1999).

#### Obstacle Two: Culture

Another factor that can have negative impact on education for Hispanic migrant children is culture. Their unique culture, influenced by several factors, is very different from that of virtually all of the educators they encounter as well as most of their classmates. As one author expresses, “What seems logical, sensible, important, and reasonable in one culture may seem irrational, stupid, and unimportant to an outsider” (Wrigley, p.45, 2001). Lack of understanding of another’s culture can lead to misunderstandings and wrongful assumptions. For students, it may mean an increasing feeling of not being accepted or understood. As Romanowki points out, students’ cultural backgrounds sometimes cause them to have conflicts with school or classroom regulations. He presents the example of fighting, in which he explains that many physical altercations involving migrant students may be a result of their strong belief in the need to value and defend family honor (Romanowski, 2002). Culture is telling them one thing while school rules are telling them another. In a separate study, Romanowski presents an incident involving a migrant girl and her younger brother. The boy was emotionally distressed at being separated from his sister; he cried throughout class and repeatedly attempted to leave his table during lunch to see her. This is another issue that raises the question of how educators should deal with cultural differences, in this case, close migrant family bonds with older siblings being responsible for younger ones (Romanowski, 2001).

Other culturally based beliefs about children's behavior and education itself can directly influence academic performance and create difficulties for teachers. As one report discusses, teachers may expect children to speak and interact with them while, at home, their parents require silent attention when adults are speaking (Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs, 1995). Migrant parents may expect their children to do homework independently, while their teachers may want parental involvement in certain assignments (Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Affairs, 1995). Martinez and Velazquez assert that migrant mothers define education as based on character development, such as developing a child's manners, values, morals, and sense of respect and responsibility. This cultural belief differs greatly from teachers who are geared toward developing academics such as reading, writing, and math skills (2000). In many traditional Hispanic families, children are raised with the belief that the needs of the family take precedence over the needs of the individual. Children generally perform many chores and tasks for the good of the family. These same families many times see these types of values as threatened by the American education system in which independence and individualism are greatly emphasized (Wrigley, 2001). Clearly, as illustrated in each of the examples discussed, culture of Hispanic migrants can greatly affect their education in this country.

### Overcoming the Culture Barrier

Two major themes appear repeatedly in the literature as the most important and necessary methods for overcoming problems related to cultural differences: 1) make educators

knowledgeable in Hispanic migrant culture and 2) integrate migrant culture into class activities (Romanowski, 2002; Calderon, 1997; Villarreal & Revilla, 1998; Whittaker & Salend, 1997; Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Affairs, 1995). When teachers possess an understanding of migrant culture and make efforts to weave it into class activities, migrant student performance may improve. Making educators knowledgeable about Hispanic migrant culture can be achieved through teacher training/staff development (Brunn & Delany-Barmann, 2001). Prospective teachers may also gain cultural insight through multicultural education courses as part of their teacher preparation programs (Coballes-Vega, 1992). Teachers can learn to take cultural learning preferences into account when planning. As mentioned previously, some cultural groups, including Hispanics, interact well in cooperative grouping instructional activities, perhaps because of the similarities to learning in their own cultures (Coballes-Vega, 1992). As for integration of culture into classroom lessons, research has shown that the use of materials that connect to students' prior knowledge may improve self-concept as well as comprehension (Weaver as cited in Whittaker & Salend, 1997). Also, incorporating culture into class activities can make a positive contribution to *everyone* in the class, not just migrant children. Villarreal and Revilla explain that teachers and schools find it beneficial to all students to integrate students' culture and rich array of experiences into their curriculum. They go on to state that implementing a curriculum representative of all members of a school community, is a way of providing a more complete and realistic educational experience for the students (1991). Culture can span a broad spectrum. As Romanowski points out, understanding and incorporating the valuable resource of Hispanic migrant culture in the classroom includes beliefs, practices, and values in addition to food, holidays and clothing (2001). Teachers can include migrant and Hispanic culture into their lessons in a number of ways. Some specific suggestions include

Christmas art projects involving the poinsettia along with an accompanying story (Brunn & Delany-Barmann,2001), a comparison of Halloween in the U.S. to Mexico's Day of the Dead or each county's respective Independence Days, and writing assignments about work in the fields or migration (Montavon & Kinser, 1996). Whittaker and Salend offer suggestions of books, poems, and other literary works as well as videos that relate to the various aspects of the culture. They also recommend that teachers create writing assignments such as dialogue journals and/or art assignments that deal with migrant experiences (1997). With teachers who understand and embrace their culture, Hispanic migrant children may feel acceptance in the classroom environment.

#### Obstacle Three: Lack of Parental Involvement

The education of Hispanic migrant students is also confronted by another obstacle associated with culture: the frequent absence of migrant parents in most aspects of their children's education. Research demonstrates that children are successful when schools show support for parents as the child's primary teacher and when parents are welcomed and involved in all aspects of their educational life (President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, 1996). Educators often attribute failure in school to a lack of involvement on the part of their parents (Martinez & Velazquez, 2000). Unfortunately, in the case of Hispanic migrant parents, involvement is frequently minimal. Consequently, teachers and other school professionals often develop the perception that this lack of parental involvement means that the parents have no interest or concern in their children's education (Romanowski, 2002). This belief could have impact on the manner in which teachers treat students, because teachers may believe that their treatment of or decisions about students will not be questioned by

their parents (Romanowski, 2001). Literature indicates that the belief that migrant parents are generally disinterested in their children's education is a misconception. It is actually the ambition of most migrant parents that their children's futures include leaving the migrant lifestyle and becoming well educated (Green, 2003). Another report echoes this point, explaining that migrant parents have great respect for teachers' opinions and view education as a way for their children to break the migrant cycle (Diaz, Trotter, & Rivera as cited in Whittaker & Salend, 1997). Wrigley (2001) also explains that migrant parents generally value education and recognize its importance for their children; however, actually providing ongoing support for their children's education often still does not occur.

If lack of parental involvement does not usually equate to lack of parental concern, then to what can we attribute it? There are actually several important factors that are the actual contributors to this lack of involvement on the part of migrant parents. One obvious obstacle that many parents face is the same one that their children in the school system struggle with on a daily basis: language. Those educators who lack cultural, social, and linguistic sensitivity in working with Hispanic students, generally experience the same shortcomings with the parents of such students (President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, 1996). As another researcher indicates, parents may feel intimidated by schools for various reasons, not the least of which is that they lack mastery of the language and cannot communicate effectively with teachers and administrators (Perry, 1997). In one report, parents themselves cite the lack of English as a barrier that impedes their participation in education. The language barrier limits them, not only in communicating with teachers, but also in helping with homework assignments (Martinez & Velazquez, 2000). Another report highlights yet a different conflict associated with language, in which parents begin to have difficulty communicating with

their own children, who are being encouraged to speak English by educators and even other family members (Brunn, 1999).

Lack of education, minimal educational experiences, and lack of information about our country's educational systems on the part of migrant parents, all hamper involvement in their children's education. Most parents who *are* educated, received their education in their own countries and, therefore, are unfamiliar with schools in the United States (Green, 2003). Other parents may be intimidated by our schools because they do not have previous experience as students or as parents of students (Perry, 1997). One report explains that most migrant workers come from rural Mexico and, therefore, probably did not attend school beyond the elementary or middle school years (Gibson & Bejinez, 2002). Further, Martinez and Velazquez tell us that most migrant parents lack, among other things, the educational background necessary to participate in their children's education to the level of expectations of schools (2000). Parents with little education of their own may have difficulty in helping their children with advanced levels of homework (Martinez as cited in Martinez and Velazquez, 2000).

There are various, additional factors that have a negative influence on migrant parental involvement in their children's education. Among these factors are financial difficulties and lack of time. Many migrant parents, like other working-class parents, do not have the financial means to buy educational materials and supplies for their children. Also, the long workdays associated with migrant labor frequently prevent parents from assisting with homework or attending school-related activities (Martinez & Velazquez, 2000). Transportation is also cited as a problem for some Hispanic parents; they may have no means for getting to their children's schools (President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, 1996). Many migrant parents may not have child care available and, therefore, are hindered from

attending school meetings or activities (Montavon & Kinser, 1996). Wrigley also includes length of residence in the United States, positive attitude, and economic need among the factors that most commonly affect migrant parental involvement (2001). As summed up by Whitaker and Salend, long workdays, childcare needs, and language and cultural differences all act as barriers to the establishment of traditional parent-teacher communication (1997).

### Increasing Parental Involvement

Available research and literature repeatedly point to certain specific practices to increase the level of involvement on the part of migrant parents. Virtually all of the recommended solutions involve efforts on the part of teachers as well as other members of the educational community, indicating that this issue is best addressed through a collaborative effort. Since the language barrier is, in many cases, one of the greatest hindrances to parent/school communication, it is strongly advised that schools make efforts to provide Spanish language in parental contacts. One report suggests that all matters regarding their children should be provided to Hispanic parents in both English and Spanish (President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, 1996). Romanowski goes on to offer that, in addition to translating correspondence, bilingual interpreters be provided by the schools at all parent meetings (2002). Green stresses these same points, explaining that forms, rules, questionnaires, and applications should be provided in the parent's language and also explained (2003). Another recommendation is that the school policy book be printed in Spanish and provided to parents for reference (Cranston-Gingras & Anderson, 1990). Along those same lines, bilingual community liaisons could be employed to assist parents in educational matters in one or both languages (Martinez & Velazquez, 2000). School systems with the available

resources may opt to offer actual English instruction to migrant parents, possibly coupled with a type of pre-school lessons for their young children (Belton, 2000).

Providing language assistance is one vital step in encouraging migrant parental involvement in education. With the language barrier addressed, it is also advised that schools take other types of measures in order to welcome and involve parents. Clearly, it is critical that educators understand child-rearing practices and family relationships in addition to interpersonal communication, if they are to truly understand any culturally diverse parents (Coballes-Vega, 1992). It is recommended that school administrators address such issues as transportation, childcare, and meeting times when planning meetings so that migrant parents might be more likely to attend (President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, 1996). Educators could feasibly provide childcare during meetings, provide transportation to meetings, schedule evening or weekend meeting times, and offer school facilities for community activities (Salend & Taylor as cited in Whittaker & Salend 1997). Some researchers suggest that a school or school system's migrant coordinator or migrant advocate counselor assist with such things as home visits and other contacts, creating a parent-teacher advisory committee, as well as scheduling evening meetings with migrant parents with child care and transportation provided (Cranston-Gingras & Anderson, 1990). Parent meetings, conducted with the assistance of a bilingual interpreter, should address issues that are most important to these types of parents. Such issues might include enrollment procedures, communicating with teachers and administrators, grading policies, class expectations, and contact information for assistance programs (Romanowski, 2002). School administrators should also ensure that procedures are explained that may have affect on migrant or undocumented children (Green, 2003). Meetings with can also be viewed as an opportunity for parents to express themselves

about their own potential contributions to their children's education (Martinez & Velazquez, 2000). Brunn and Delany-Barmann go even further by suggesting the possibility of including parents in planning policies and programs (2001). Upon enrollment or reenrollment, parents could also schedule an appointment for a few weeks later to find out how their child is doing in the new school setting (Rumberger, 2002). Wrigley recommends, among other things, to not only encourage parents to take an active role at home, but to assist them in learning to use technology such as computers (2001).

Educators should also make efforts to recognize and make use of the positive influence and contributions that migrant parents can have on their children's education. In one project discussed, teachers learned to conduct ethnographic interviews with students' family members to learn more about culture. In this way, parents have the opportunity to share information about their lives and ideas about a variety of topics, thus providing resource information for the teacher and a sense of importance to the parents (U.S. Department of Education, 1995). Other literature suggests that migrant parents provide their children with great emotional resources, such as a strong work ethic, responsibility, and having self-respect as well as being respectful of others (Martinez & Velazquez, 2000). Parents sometimes use cultural narratives to encourage their children to succeed academically by explaining how difficult their own lives were due to a lack of education (Delgado-Gaitan as cited in Martinez & Velazquez, 2000). Teachers may even further involve migrant parents by inviting them to share some of their experiences with the entire class (Whittaker & Salend, 1997).

#### Obstacle Four: Migratory Lifestyle/Mobility

As explained in Chapter 1, migrant workers in the United States move from place to place for purposes of obtaining work, generally to harvest and/or process crops. One author cites the example of a typical family who moves from Florida to Georgia to New York and back to Florida again during one year, maintaining employment by working with various crops (Wrigley, 2001). Children may live in even as many as eight different states in one year as their families seek employment and the length of stay in each location may vary from days to months (Green, 2003). According to one study, in some cases, migrant children may attend between two and six schools each year (Whittaker & Salend, 1997). Another author places that number even higher, indicating that some migrant families move in and out of school districts as many as ten times during a single school year (Trotter, 1992). Families who don't follow crops from place to place for work, may simply work in one location for a season and then return to Mexico each year when they have neither money nor employment (Gibson & Bejinez, 2002). As previously mentioned, in many of the migrant workers' patterns of mobility, one result is that migrant children often enroll in school well after the beginning of the school year.

Fortunately, more and more traditionally migrant families are beginning to become less mobile as they obtain jobs in agricultural or poultry processing plants (Wrigley, 2001) and due to the fact the farm workforce is now being comprised of more single young males (NAWS as cited in Wrigley, 2001). There are, however, a multitude of educational problems still associated with the high mobility that is an inherent part of the lives of the classic migrant workers' children. In fact, one author argues that high mobility might be the single greatest impediment to academic success of many migrant students (Romanowski, 2001). One of the primary and fundamental problems that is directly related to mobility is that of high student absenteeism. Moving,

enrolling late, and leaving during the school year, all result in students missing valuable instruction time and accruing high numbers of absences. Green (2003) explains that for many poor migrant parents, their children's school attendance is determined by the families' needs, making education a luxury. If there is money to pay the bills, children may attend school; if not, they may sometimes miss school in order to work. Children who are capable often offer an important financial contribution to the family income because of their endurance and strength in migrant labor (Platt & Cranston-Gingras, 1991).

Changes or disruptions in school attendance and high numbers of absences tightly anchor the thick web of educational difficulties that is generally a part of the migrant child's life. One of the negative educational consequences is with the way in which migrant children gradually begin to perceive both their own lives and their schooling. An unfortunate occurrence is that these children, who already have so little stability in their lives, begin to view their education as temporary and unstable, also. (Romanowski, 2002). These children must certainly become disheartened and frustrated with trying to adjust and readjust to new schools, classes, and classmates so frequently (Whittaker & Salend, 1997). They may begin to have little desire to devote energy into something they will likely soon be leaving (Romanowski, 2002). Because their lifestyle, filled with responsibilities, does not afford them much opportunity to participate in many school activities, some migrant students may feel little motivation to attend school (Green, 2003). Thus, a vicious cycle of problems permeates the educational lives of many migrant children.

The aforementioned problems of frequent mobility, high absenteeism, and negative student perceptions and feelings about school all affect or contribute to yet additional negative consequences. Students living with such circumstances of migrant life may have difficulty

working at grade level, receiving academic credits, or meeting requirements because their education is so splintered and they are being switched from one academic program to another as they move from place to place (Green, 2003). According to the U.S. General Accounting Office, research indicates that mobile students, with no other specific similarities of background, have an average lower achievement than non-mobile students. One example specifies grade retention and below-grade-level reading scores as being associated with mobility (US. General Accounting Office as cited in Rumberger, 2002). A report from the U.S. Department of Education includes the following among its listed consequences of education discontinuity: academic achievement that is lower than other students, loss of credits due to inappropriate class placement, failure to attend school, and feelings of discouragement which sometimes lead to dropping out of school altogether (US Dept of Education PES, 2002, fix citation). Romanowski also examines the unfortunate reality of dropping out of school. He explains that migrant children feel less and less compelled to achieve high school graduation after cultural differences and inadequate educational assistance for their needs leaves them feeling alienated and frustrated (Romanowski, 2001). Dropping out of school is actually discussed frequently in literature on migrant and Hispanic education. In fact, the dropout rate in the United States is higher for Hispanic students than for any other ethnic group (President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, 2002). Evidence strongly suggests that mobility in high school as well as during elementary school lessens that likelihood that a student will complete high school (Rumberger, 2002). In examining the National Agricultural Workers Survey, research shows that one fourth of school-aged children of farm workers were below their grade level or had dropped out; for those children who actually labor in the fields the percentage was even greater—more than one third (Huang, 2002).

## Counteracting the Effects of Mobility

Unfortunately, educators can do little to prevent the frequent moving from place to place that occurs in the lives of migrant families. As has been discussed, mobility is directly linked to income for many families. Our education system must, therefore, take other, more feasible approaches to ensure the best possible education for migrant students in our schools. Such approaches involve efforts on the part of all parties: teachers, counselors, principals, districts, students, and parents, if they are to be successful.

Teachers working directly with migrant students can employ teaching techniques that are directly geared toward those students. For example, students could be taught strategies and skills for acquiring, storing, and recalling information. These are skills they can take with them from one school to another that will be of benefit to them (Platt & Cranston-Gingras, 1991).

Guidance counselors and school administrators can greatly contribute to success of migrant/mobile students as well. Along with principals, counselors can establish specific procedures that address the needs of incoming students during the school year. As a part of the procedures, incoming students' enrollment history should be assessed, so that the progress of students with more than three previous school changes could be closely monitored (Rumberger, 2002). One valuable recommendation is that principals help provide consistency in curriculum for migrant students transferring in and out by ensuring that some teachers are trained in the use of the Migrant Student Record Transferring System, or MSRTS (Romanowski, 2002). Established in 1969, MSRTS is a computerized network used to transfer educational and health records of migrant students, both within and across state boundaries (Cranston-Gingras & Anderson, 1990). Use of MSRTS assists schools in keeping close track of students' classes and reduces unnecessary repetition of classes or misplacement in classes. Counselors or other school

designees can also be responsible with developing dropout recovery activities that target migrant children (Villarreal & Revilla, 1998). Another important recommendation for counselors and school administrators has to do with course availability. Slots could be held and certain classes left below the maximum allowable capacity to ensure that students who enter school late are able to enroll in or transfer into the classes that they need (Villarreal & Revilla, 1998). In a variation offered on this idea, migrant students would be prescheduled for their fall classes (Cranston-Gingras & Anderson, 1990).

Literature directs us toward several similar alternatives that involve allowances or flexibility in course credit for migrant/mobile students. These possible implementations would be decided at the school or district level. One route that schools may take is that of completion of coursework by correspondence. In one such example, students are given their class assignments to take with them and complete while they move with their family from one location to another. They may even be provided with a toll-free phone number if they should need assistance with the work. Upon their return to the school or district, the students are tested and granted credit for the class/es (Belton, 2000). A variation on this idea involves providing migrant students with credit consolidation for partial classes or credits and for incomplete work so that they receive at least something for their efforts and are not completely penalized for having to enroll late or withdraw early (Villarreal & Revilla, 1998). Programs like the Secondary Credit Exchange Program of Washington are designed to enable high school migrant students to attend late afternoon and evening classes in order to continue their education (Cranston-Gingras & Anderson, 1990). Other, more general, approaches include flexible programming for migrant children, in which they are allowed to temporarily drop out of school for various family

responsibilities and later return to their academics without penalties (Martinez & Velazquez, 2000).

In regard to school district policies, one author advises that those districts with high numbers of mobile students consider the idea of being flexible with their school boundaries (Rumberger, 2002). As discussed previously, providing transportation for students to attend school and other school related activities is a strong tool for any district to use for encouraging attendance and promoting education (Rumberger, 2002). In order to minimize what is already a difficult situation for many migrant children, districts must also cooperate with each other and do everything possible to support student transfers as they occur (Rumberger, 2002). Another measure offered by some researchers would include schools, churches, and other community centers to collaborate to provide migrant children and adults with additional opportunities for work training and education (Martinez & Velazquez, 2000).

Based on findings represented in available literature and research, the education of Hispanic migrant students in parts of the United States very clearly merits further examination. Faced with such foreboding obstacles as language, cultural differences, lack of parental support, and high mobility, many of these students and their educators could certainly benefit from informed input and assistance. This study was created in an effort to increase the knowledge base surrounding Hispanic migrant student education and, ideally, be of use to those involved in the daily decision-making, planning, implementation and instruction of such needy and deserving children.

## METHODOLOGY/PROCEDURES

This study is one that is primarily of quantitative research. Data were collected in the winter of 2003-2004 in both elementary and secondary schools in two school systems in southeastern North Carolina. Quantitative data is based on results from answers to survey questions to which teachers in the selected schools responded.

The study was developed to answer three major questions. One purpose was to determine which factors teachers find the most detrimental to their efforts at educating Hispanic migrant students. The study was also designed to identify which currently implemented practices are found to be most effective by those same teachers. Thirdly, teachers were asked to provide their professional estimations regarding best possible recommendations for improvement in education of Hispanic migrant children.

### Participants

The surveys used as the data collection instrument in this study were distributed to 502 regular classroom teachers in two southeastern North Carolina school systems. This sample group was comprised of 253 secondary school teachers and 249 elementary teachers. Both secondary and elementary teachers were included in the study in order to obtain a broad view of input on the topic, as well as to draw any comparisons and contrasts between the two school levels.

Two major factors were considered in selecting the school systems to take place in this study. The first factor was Hispanic population within the school system. Using data from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction for 2002-2003, both Columbus and

Duplin County Schools were found to be among the top fifty percent of systems in the state with regard to number of Hispanic students. The second factor that was considered in school system selection was that of agricultural employment. To make this determination, the database of the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services was utilized in the search. With regards to the state's leading crops that require the greatest labor force (tobacco, sweet potatoes, cotton, etc.), both Columbus and Duplin counties were found to be among the top ten counties in the state for overall production. These two factors were considered for selection in an effort to sample teachers who have in their classrooms not only Hispanic students, but specifically those who come from migrant or former migrant family situations.

#### Instrumentation

The data collection instrument used in this study was a self-administered survey developed by the researcher. The survey, one page, double-sided in length, consists of four major sections (see Appendix A). The first section contains two forced-choice questions used to determine approximate numbers of Hispanic migrant/former migrant students in the teacher's class as well as the type of program used in the school for ESL students.

The second section of the survey contains twenty-one factors that may or may not negatively affect instruction of Hispanic migrant students. These items were selected directly based on the information extracted from the literature review. The most frequently cited negative factors were included as separate survey items in this section. The literature presented these negative factors in a variety of contexts; some pertain more to secondary schools while others apply mainly to elementary settings. Some factors may apply to either

level and have their basis in specific categories such as mobility or culture. Items in this section range from issues that pertain directly to the classroom and instruction to others such as parental background, financial resources, and healthcare. In this second section of the survey, teachers are provided closed-ended items along with a five point Likert scale with which to rate each of the twenty-one factors as they affect their instruction of their Hispanic migrant students. The five choices range from *doesn't affect at all* to *affects greatly*.

The third section of the survey presents teachers with nineteen practices and asks them to rate their belief about the effectiveness of each in their own instruction of Hispanic migrant students. The items range from teacher behaviors and classroom/ instructional strategies to issues related to parents and the community as well as resources. Each item was, again, taken from the review of literature as techniques, practices, or behaviors that are frequently in place when dealing with Hispanic migrants or ESL children. Care was taken to include some items that are discouraged by the literature along with those that are recommended. These items are also of the closed-ended style. A five point Likert scale is provided with choices ranging from *not effective at all* to *very effective*. The option of *does not occur in my class* is provided as the middle or number 3 choice.

The fourth and final section of the data collection instrument asks teachers to indicate the five practices that they believe would most improve the quality of education for Hispanic migrant students in their classes. Ten possible selections are provided in forced-choice format. Each one contains a practice that was suggested from literature on educational improvements recommended in this area. In this section, teachers are also provided with a blank *other* category in which they may write in a suggestion other than the choices given.

## Data Collection

Quantitative data was collected during the winter of 2003-2004. Quantitative data consisted of teacher responses to a self-administered survey designed and provided by the researcher. Two southeastern North Carolina school systems were selected based on the criteria of Hispanic student population and agriculture-based economy, as previously discussed. All 502 teachers within the systems' selected representative schools were provided with a copy of the survey. The surveys were both distributed and returned via the school systems' respective courier services. The survey was designed to take an estimated five to ten minutes to complete. Of the 502 surveys that were distributed, 251 or exactly 50%, were completed and returned. The responses provided were recorded and compiled on by the researcher in order to obtain individual totals for each item.

## Data Analysis

Data were analyzed within the individual sections of the survey. In the first section, there are two forced choice items. For both items, the total number of responses to each possible provided choice was recorded. Then each number was also figured as a percentage of the number of total responses to the item.

The second section of the survey contains twenty-one closed-ended items along with a five point Likert scale. For these items, the number of individual responses was recorded for each. Next, percentages were calculated for each item to illustrate what percent of total responses were given for each of the five possible choices. An average rating was not calculated for these items since the middle choice provided was *uncertain*. With these types of items, reaching an average rating of 3, for example, would not necessarily be an accurate

reflection of responses since the majority of those surveyed may have answered 4 (*affects somewhat*) and 2 (*affects a little*).

Data collected in the third section of the survey were analyzed in the same method as the second section. This section contains nineteen items and a five point Likert scale with which to rate each one. The number of individual responses was recorded for each one. Percentages were then calculated for the separate response choices for each individual item. This was done to establish what percentage of total respondents found each practice to be *very effective, somewhat effective, etc.* An average rating for each item was not calculated due the fact that the number 3 choice on the Likert scale was *does not occur in my class*. Calculating an average for each of these items could provide an inaccurate representation of the responses because numbers 2 and 4 are *slightly effective* and *somewhat effective* respectively.

In the last section of the survey in this study, teachers indicated the practices or changes they believed would most improve the quality of education for their Hispanic migrant students. For the data analysis in this section, the total number of responses given for each of the possible choices was recorded. A percentage was calculated for each item to illustrate what percent of all respondents selected each item among their choices. This data was first analyzed separately for elementary and secondary teachers and then viewed jointly in order to examine comparisons and contrasts between the two levels of teachers.

## Limitations

The research conducted in this study has two particular limitations that must be noted as the data, findings, and implications are presented and examined. In spite of these

limitations, this research is intended to be an important contribution to available knowledge and resources in this field, as well as a point from which further research may be derived in the future.

The first limitation is one that may be expected with most research of this nature. Because the data collection instrument employed here was a self-administered survey, there is always the possibility that the responses generated may be flawed due to any of several factors. Although the instrument was designed to be done in a short amount of time, respondents may have completed it hastily and, therefore, inaccurately.

Since the survey was self-administered and the researcher was not present while the surveys were being completed, there was also no opportunity for questions to be posed and explanations to be offered. Even though the survey was designed to be clear and thorough, there was no opportunity for confusions experienced by those surveyed to be addressed. This could possibly lead to erroneous assumptions and answers that do not accurately reflect the teachers' beliefs and experiences.

As is true for much research conducted, there also exists the possibility that the participants in the study may have been less than forthcoming or sincere in their indicated responses. Of course, efforts were taken to minimize such a possibility; the surveys were done anonymously, with no identifying information and teachers afforded the opportunity to complete them at their leisure.

The second limitation of this research study has to do with data collected in the first section of the survey administered. According to responses, more than 92 percent of participants have ten or fewer migrant students in their class/classes. Because a large majority of participants have these relatively low numbers of the students in question, it can

be expected that all subsequent answers are, therefore, geared toward those types of numbers. Classroom teachers who regularly teach higher numbers of Hispanic migrant students would possibly provide some responses that vary from those found here, due to their unique resources and experiences. Similarly, all teachers sampled in this study teach in schools with similar types of programs for ESL students. From one perspective, homogeneous ESL programs in the schools of those surveyed may pose limitations in regard to specific questions within data collection instrument.

## FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the findings and analysis of the data collected from self-administered surveys completed by both elementary and secondary school teachers in two southeast North Carolina school systems. Of the 502 surveys distributed, 251 were completed and returned, yielding a return rate of precisely 50%.

Data was collected and recorded regarding Hispanic migrant student population in the classroom and type of ESL programs in place. Two more sets of data were collected using Likert-type scales with regard to specific possible deterrents to instruction and to practices or behaviors found to be effective in instruction. The final set of collected data records teachers' estimations of beneficial changes or improvements for the instruction in question.

### Section 1

Analysis of the data from the initial section reveals information to be used as a lens through which the remainder of the collected data must be viewed. The first item is forced-choice and provides critical data as to the number of Hispanic migrant students in the classrooms of the teachers sampled. Of those teachers who completed surveys, 188 (75.2%) indicate that they have between one and four Hispanic migrant children in their classes. Forty three teachers (17%) have between five and ten Hispanic migrant students in their classes. Only twenty teachers reported having numbers greater than ten in their classes.

Table 1. Number of Spanish speaking migrant/former migrant students

<b>Number of students</b>	<b>1-4</b>	<b>5-10</b>	<b>11-20</b>	<b>21-30</b>	<b>30+</b>
Number of responses	188	43	13	2	5
Percentage of total responses	75.2%	17%	.052%	.0079%	.00199%

## Section 2

The second section of the survey used in the study presented twenty-one factors and asked teachers to indicate the extent to which they believe each one negatively affects their instruction of Hispanic migrant students. Among the most significant of the findings analyzed, 46% indicated that the *lack of bilingual personnel* greatly affects their instruction, 44% indicated that *students starting school late or moving in and out of schools* greatly affects their instruction, and 38% reported that the *language barrier between teacher(s) and students* greatly affects their instruction. The next highest reported factors that negatively affect instruction were: *language barrier between educators and parents* (37%), *low education level of parents* (36%), and *poor student mastery of academic material* (31%). Factors found to have the least negative effect on instruction among teachers surveyed were *poverty/lack of school supplies/attire* (0 %), *inadequate healthcare* (.06 %), and *poor nutrition* (1%). The full findings as analyzed in this section are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Factors that negatively affect instruction of Hispanic migrant students

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Percentage of responses reported as “greatly affects”</b>
Lack of bilingual personnel	46%
Students starting school late/moving in and out of schools	44%
Language barrier between teacher(s) and students	38%
Language barrier between educators and parents	36%
Poor student mastery of academic material	31%
Lack of parental involvement in children’s education	25%
Excessive student absences	19%
Students enrolled below grade level	19%
Difficulty in assessing student ability	18%
Lack of teacher training in methods for diverse students	18%
Unknown vocabulary in assignments and tests	18%
Lack of financial resources for specialized materials	17.5%
Lack of pre-school preparation	17%
Cultural differences related to academic expectations	13%
Cultural differences related to school behavior	12.5%
Lack of transportation for students or parents	12.5%
Language barrier among students	12%
Poor nutrition	1%
Inadequate healthcare	.06%
Poverty/lack of school supplies/attire	0%

Although literature presents poor nutrition, inadequate healthcare, and poverty as factors that often have a negative impact on Hispanic migrant education, research in this study found that teachers believe those three factors to be insignificant. A possible reason for this finding here may be that students in the two school systems from which teachers were sampled, generally suffer from all of those factors, both Hispanic migrant and non-Hispanic, non-migrant. Both Columbus and Duplin are counties that have been designated as “low-wealth” for 2003-2004 by the federal government (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2004). As reported for the 2000-2001 school year, Columbus County Schools averaged 60.39% of their students receiving free or reduced lunches and Duplin County Schools averaged 58.29% of their students receiving free or reduced lunches (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2001). Free or reduced meal qualifications are based on income and number of family members. Also, both counties rank in the lower fifty percent for the state for average per capita income (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2003).

### Section 3

In the third section of the data collection instrument, the teachers sampled were asked to indicate the extent to which they believe each of nineteen practices is effective in their instruction of Hispanic migrant students. Table 3 presents the data as analyzed in this section. The practices most frequently reported to be *very effective* are *cooperative teaching/learning activities* (45%), *use of visual aids* (37%), *hands-on /role-playing activities* (36%), and *physical gestures/demonstrations/movements* (36%).

Table 3. Factors found to be somewhat or very effective in instruction of Hispanic migrant students.

Strategies	Percentage reported as “somewhat effective”	Percentage reported as “very effective”
Cooperative teaching/learning activities	45%	45%
Use of visual aids	43%	37%
Hands on/role-playing activities	54.5%	36%
Physical gestures/demonstrations/movements	53%	36%
Teacher encourages student participation/non-threatening environment	45%	35.5%
School’s ESL program/assistance	63.6%	28%
Teacher speaks clearly, rephrases, repeats, refrains from use of idioms	46%	27%
Total physical response activities	55%	27%
Bilingual assistants/volunteers	18%	19%
Peer tutoring	63%	19%
Accommodations provided to enhance teacher/parent communication	62%	18%
Frequent comprehension assessment/variety of assessment strategies	60%	18%
Strategies using written Spanish language	27%	17%
Instruction offered strictly in English	44%	.09%
Community involvement	72%	0%
Migrant culture incorporated in class activities	61%	0%
Teacher limits length of utterances and using simple vocabulary	63%	0%
Bilingual textbooks/ancillaries	36%	0%
Some oral instruction provided in Spanish	27%	0%

As previously indicated, this third section of the survey contained items with practices that are suggested in relevant literature as occurring in instruction of Hispanic migrant students. The middle choice in the Likert scale in this section was provided for the response of *does not occur in my class*. These responses were also analyzed to determine which practices are taking place with least frequency in the classes of those teachers sampled. Of the nineteen practices in these items, four returned the most significant percentage of responses. The practices that occur least frequently were found to be *bilingual volunteers/assistants*, *strategies using written Spanish language (signs, labels, etc.)*, *bilingual textbooks/ancillaries*, and *some oral instruction provided in Spanish*. Table 4 shows these results in full.

Table 4. Practices reported to occur least frequently

<b>Practice</b>	<b>Percentage reported as not occurring in class</b>
Bilingual volunteers/assistants	44%
Strategies using written Spanish language	42.7%
Bilingual textbooks/ancillaries	40%
Some oral instruction provided in Spanish	40%
Migrant culture incorporated in class activities	32%
Teacher limits length of utterances and uses simple vocabulary	29%
Community involvement	26%
Frequent comprehension assessment/ variety of assessment strategies	24.3%
Accommodations provided to enhance teacher/parent communication	18%
Cooperative teaching/learning activities	15%

## Section 4

The fourth and final section of the survey administered in this study offers teachers forced-choice items through which they are asked to indicate practices or changes that they believe would most improve the quality of education for their Hispanic migrant students. Practices included in the provided choices were, again, taken from relevant literature and research as recommended enhancements to migrant educations. The data here were analyzed separately for elementary and secondary teachers for the purpose of comparing and contrasting the two levels.

Results for the elementary teachers sampled show two practices or changes that were found to be equally and significantly important to them: *accommodations to encourage parental involvement* and *bilingual teachers/ assistants*, with eighty-five teachers or almost 57% selecting those among their choices. Table 5 presents all of the results of elementary teachers' chosen recommendations.

Table 5. Practices/changes recommended by elementary teachers

<b>Practice/Change</b>	<b>Number of times selected</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Accommodations to encourage parental involvement	85	56.7%
Bilingual teachers/assistants in all classrooms as needed	85	56.7%
Specialized teacher training in ESL strategies	77	51.3%
Mandatory pre-school participation for Hispanic migrant children in school district	74	49.3%
Specialized teacher training in teaching diverse students	62	41.3%
Content instruction provided in English and Spanish	61	40.7%
Specialized teacher training provided in understanding Hispanic/migrant culture	47	31.3%
Textbooks and ancillaries provided in Spanish	36	24%
Specialized teacher training provided in Spanish	33	22%
Additional funding for school-based nutrition and healthcare programs for migrants	17	11.3%

In this final section of the survey, teachers were also provided with a space labeled as *other*, in which they could include a self-generated response in addition to the choices. Twelve of the surveyed elementary teachers chose to include a self-generated suggestion. Table 6 contains each of the teachers' own suggestions.

Table 6. Elementary teachers' self-generated suggestions for improvement

Suggestion of practice/change	Number of times suggested
English classes for parents	3
English classes for Spanish-speaking students	2
Non-English-speaking students attend alternative school with ESL teacher/classes	2
After-school tutoring in communities	1
Group Hispanic students in same class to help each other	1
No bilingual instruction should be necessary; students have been here long enough to know English	1
Provide incentives for pre-K participation	1
Schools with high numbers of Spanish-speaking students should have full-time ESL teacher	1

Results were calculated separately for secondary school teachers as they selected from the list of ten practices or changes to improve the quality of instruction for their Hispanic migrant students. The practice with the greatest response was *specialized teacher training in ESL strategies*, with sixty-five responses received, or 64.4%. Three other selections all received the second highest number of responses with fifty-seven, or 56.4%. Table 7 contains all of the results for secondary teachers' choices for changes or practices for improvement.

Table 7. Practices/changes recommended by secondary teachers

<b>Practice/Change</b>	<b>Number of times selected</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Specialized teacher training in ESL strategies	65	64.4%
Accommodations provided to encourage parental involvement	57	56.4%
Bilingual teachers or teacher assistants in all classrooms as needed	57	56.4%
Content instruction provided in both English and Spanish	57	56.4%
Textbooks and ancillaries provided in Spanish	51	50.5%
Specialized teacher training provided in teaching diverse students	42	41.6%
Mandatory pre-school participation for Hispanic migrant children in school district	34	33.7%
Specialized teacher training provided in Spanish	31	30.7%
Specialized teacher training in understanding Hispanic/migrant culture	29	28.7%
Additional funding for school-based nutrition and healthcare programs for migrants	12	11.9%

The survey administered to the sampled secondary teachers was the same as for elementary, so secondary teachers were also provided the option of writing in their own suggestions for changes or practices for improvement in addition to the choices listed. Seven of the sampled teachers elected to include self-generated responses here. As with the elementary teachers who included self-generated responses, the secondary teachers' suggestions were geared primarily toward the language barrier. Each suggestion was made only once. Table 8 contains all of the suggestions given.

Table 8. Secondary teachers' self-generated suggestions for improvement

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<b>Suggestion of practice/change</b>
Ensure that students learn English before placement in regular class
Have Spanish teacher teach basic Spanish to English-speaking students
Pay peers to tutor non-English speaking students
Place students in separate classrooms until moderately functional
Provide intensive English language training for parents and students
Provide specialized ESL class to teach English outside of the classroom
Provide transportation and labs

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Although each suggestion focuses primarily on the language barrier, one teacher took the unique position of proposing that the English-speaking students learn basic Spanish. While some teachers did indicate the desire to receive training in Spanish, this was the only reference to providing Spanish instruction to the students.

#### Elementary and Secondary Responses Compared

In examining the surveyed elementary teachers' responses along with those of the secondary teachers, some interesting similarities as well as differences are evident. Of the ten possibilities for practice or changes for improvement contained in the fourth section of the survey, the same three selections comprised the top three for number of responses by both elementary and secondary teachers. Elementary teachers ranked *accommodations to encourage parental involvement* as highest; secondary teachers ranked it second highest. Secondary teachers gave the greatest number of responses to *specialized teacher training in ESL strategies*, while among elementary teachers this practice received the third highest number of responses. *Bilingual teachers or teacher assistants in all classrooms as needed* is the third recommendation found to be among the top three for all teachers; elementary ranked this choice as second highest while it received the third highest number of responses among secondary teachers.

More similarities in responses between the two levels of surveyed teachers pertain to types of teacher training other than in ESL strategies. *Specialized teacher training in teaching diverse students* received an almost equal percentage of responses from elementary and secondary teachers. The percentages were 41.3% for elementary teachers and 41.6% for secondary teachers. Although both groups responded positively to certain types of training, *specialized teacher training in Spanish* did not merit extremely high numbers of responses

among either group. Only 22% of elementary teachers and 30.7% of secondary teachers included this as one of their recommendations. Interestingly, as previously indicated, many teachers did respond favorably to the idea of providing content instruction in both Spanish and English; however, it appears much fewer numbers actually want to be responsible for providing Spanish content instruction themselves.

Although there were many similarities between responses of the two levels of teachers surveyed, two areas returned significant differences. *Textbooks and ancillaries provided in Spanish* proved to be much more important to secondary teachers (50.5%) than to elementary teachers (24%). This type of contrast is to be expected in that secondary teachers often rely greatly on textbooks and written content that can be rather sophisticated and complex. Elementary teachers, especially those in lower grades, obviously rely much less on the printed word and their students would likely not encounter profound difficulties since *all* children at that age are being taught to read anyway.

Another sharp contrast between the two levels is seen in their responses to the recommendation of *mandatory pre-school participation for Hispanic migrant children in school district*. Not surprisingly, elementary teachers placed greater importance on this practice (49.3%) than did secondary teachers (33.7%). Elementary teachers must certainly see and be forced to deal with the immediate and obvious detrimental effects associated with failure to attend pre-school, whereas secondary teachers may not.

## IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Spanish-speaking migrant children are becoming a greater and greater component of America's classrooms. Consequently, the education of Hispanic migrant students is an important issue for our educational community. This study highlighted three questions surrounding this issue: What do educators believe are the biggest obstacles in the education of Hispanic migrant students? What do educators regions believe are the best practices currently in place for educating Hispanic migrant students? What are the practices/changes that these educators believe should be implemented in order to better educate Hispanic migrant students? A synthesis of the conclusions and implications are presented here which include findings of the data as compared to the literature, proposed recommendations for changes to district and school curricula and policies based on the data, and suggestions for further research.

### Findings versus Literature

An examination of pertinent literature found that the greatest obstacles to Hispanic migrant student education fell loosely into four broad categories. Research conducted in this study provides some support for each of the categories of obstacles. The language barrier is concluded by current literature to be extremely critical. Data from this study overwhelmingly support that conclusion. This is evident in the teachers' indication that the greatest obstacle to educating their Hispanic migrant students is the lack of bilingual personnel. Also, ways to combat the language barrier were found to be at or near the forefront of all recommendations and suggestions for changes to improve education.

Unfortunately, practices that the literature recommends to assist with the obstacle of language were found to be among the least frequently implemented in the current classroom settings of the teachers surveyed. These practices range from bilingual classroom assistants and oral Spanish instruction to bilingual textbooks and use of some written Spanish in the class. By their responses, the sampled teachers indicate that they understand certain types of practices that would be beneficial, but are generally not providing these practices in their classrooms.

With regards to the language barrier, it is important to point out a specific response provided by a teacher among the group surveyed in this study. In the last section of the data collection instrument, teachers were given the option of generating their own ideas or suggestions for improving education for their Hispanic migrant students in addition to selecting from the choices provided. One teacher's written response read as, "No bilingual instruction should be necessary. Students have been here long enough to know English." A response such as the one given here illustrates some interesting misconceptions that are also often discussed in relevant literature. Unfortunately, some monolingual teachers believe that Spanish speaking children can and should simply acquire a second language without any real instruction in it and without any support in their native language. These same educators often do not understand academic performance could be greatly improved with some native language support. Many times teachers erroneously assume that when they hear a child conversing in English, the child fully grasps the language and should be able to function without difficulty in any language context, including content-specific instruction (McLaughlin as cited in Goldenberg, 1996). What educators must bear in mind is that there is vast

difference between conversing with a friend and understanding, for example, the vocabulary and discussions associated with science, math, or even grammar.

Literature cites culture as another common detriment to quality education of Hispanic migrant students. Differences in beliefs about education, family, and values have all been concluded to play a role in educational difficulties for these students. Results of this study only minimally support the findings of the literature with regard to culture. Between 12% and 13% of teachers believe that cultural differences in either school behavior or academic expectations have negative effects on the education of their Hispanic migrant students. Neither elementary nor secondary teachers included understanding Hispanic migrant culture among their top suggestions for educational improvement. While these teachers believe that culture does play a part in their students' education, it is clear that other factors, like language, are much more critical to them.

Related literature categorizes a third group of obstacles as being related to the lack of parental involvement in their children's education. Analysis of data from this study shows that although only one quarter of teachers indicated lack of parental involvement as having a negative effect on education, more than one half of both elementary and secondary teachers recommended that accommodations be provided to encourage parental involvement in their children's education. Among elementary teachers, the suggestion of encouraging parental involvement was found to be as important as having bilingual assistants in their classrooms. Although, the data found here are slightly contradictory, it appears that the majority of teachers believe that increasing parental involvement would have a positive impact on their students' educations.

The last general area into which current literature places barriers to Hispanic migrant education is that of mobility. Mobility promotes many problems such as excessive absences, student apathy, failure to receive credit, and students being enrolled below grade level (Green, 2003; Romanowski, 2002; Whitaker & Salend, 1997). Results found in the study presented here lend some support to this contention by literature. Forty-four percent of the sampled teachers cited mobility as having a great negative effect on their instruction of Hispanic migrant students. This response referred to both starting school late and to moving in and out of schools. Negative effects due to excessive student absences did have a somewhat lower return of approximately one in five teachers.

#### Migrant Difficulties Personified

In my own experience as a high school Spanish teacher in a rural school, I have witnessed virtually all of the barriers that literature and the research conducted here have revealed. As the only school faculty member fluent in Spanish, I have obviously had to help bridge the language barrier many times. Almost weekly, I am approached by teachers or other staff members who need me to interpret for them. Sometimes they need assistance with explaining a homework assignment. Other times, the need is of a more critical nature. A recent example involved the school system's nurse who needed to inform a Spanish-speaking student and her parents that she could not continue to attend school without receiving an additional required medical vaccination. On more than one occasion, I have simultaneously instructed my own class while assisting Silvia and Gilberto (two Hispanic migrant students whose names have been changed here) with their science tests or assignments. These children have no bilingual textbooks and although they are both very intelligent, struggle to

comprehend the material presented in their high school earth science class. Fortunately, some students in my Spanish class, who have an appreciation of the complexities of mastering another language, have embraced Silvia and Gilberto and attempt to help explain the work to them.

At other times, it is the students themselves who come to me for help. I have become a sort of lifeline for some of them, being the only adult in their educational setting with whom they can truly communicate. They beam bright, flashing smiles at me in the hallway and they approach me very humbly, eyes cast downward and full of polite words as they plead for my assistance: Gilberto, who is being teased by some boys in his fourth period class....Miguel, who would like to be included in selling candy for a school fundraiser...Anita, whose possessions were left on a school bus two days ago and she has not been able to ask someone to help her find them....and poor Lucila, who is lost because she does not realize that the semester ended and that she should be attending all new classes.

Jorge stands out most clearly in my mind. Unlike many of the other Hispanic migrant students, Jorge's mastery of English was fairly advanced. He was placed in my Spanish class and, although his oral Spanish was perfect, I did manage to teach him a few things about spelling and grammar. Jorge excelled in all of his classes. Occasionally, he would borrow a Spanish-English dictionary for help with difficult vocabulary as he tackled old-style English literature. He was polite, humorous, and kind to students and teachers alike. All of the teachers had high hopes that Jorge would be the first Hispanic migrant student to graduate from our school. Then he suddenly began to be absent from school. The absences became more and more frequent. Days when he did make it to class, he appeared weary and distracted. Seeing him carrying extra clothes with him on several occasions, I inquired as to

what was happening in his life. Jorge informed me that he was the only member of his family currently capable of working and was responsible for paying the family's bills. His parents provided no real support for his education; they told him that they saw no reason for him to complete high school. As the eldest child, it was Jorge's obligation to care for the family. In an effort to help, all of his teachers began to "forget" to record his absences. We even approached the superintendent of schools on his behalf. Unfortunately, three weeks prior to the end of the school year, Jorge dropped out of school, a result of culture as well as financial necessity.

## Recommendations

In examining current literature in combination with analysis of data gathered in this study, several changes could be proposed based on the findings. Although most of the literature reviewed here does not pertain to students in a specific region of the United States, the study conducted lends results specific to rural, southeast North Carolina. While some proposed changes may be general enough to transfer to a variety of environments, it is intended that these suggestions mainly be considered for schools and systems comparable to those included in the study.

Some proposals would best be directed toward school systems, as they would be changes that would be widespread and would need to be applied throughout entire systems to be most effective. The first district-wide change would refer to policy involving pre-school education. Elementary teachers included in this study advocated strongly for mandatory pre-school enrollment for Hispanic migrant students. Even with a change in policy, this improvement would still not likely be feasible without active recruitment on the part of the

school system. Recruitment for pre-school among the Hispanic migrant community would best occur with a position or positions specifically intended for this purpose. Of course, being bilingual would be an important qualification of anyone charged with this responsibility. Along with requiring pre-school attendance for these children, the school system would have to consider and respond to the other factors associated with any increased enrollment such as transportation, nutrition, class size, and increased number of teaching positions, all with the language barrier in mind.

Other proposed improvements for school systems would affect positions and hiring policies and would probably best be achieved by assessing the needs of individual schools, specifically the need for bilingual positions. Both literature and the current study indicate that there is an extreme need for bilingual aid of some type in classrooms with Hispanic migrant students. These positions could be in the form of teachers or teacher assistants as needed. Again, active recruiting, in this case for faculty, would probably yield the best results. Augmenting pay for meeting the bilingual qualification is certainly an option to be considered to achieve this possible improvement.

Along with regular classroom teachers and assistants, additional positions in the form of ESL instructors would be an important improvement for schools with Hispanic migrant enrollment. ESL teachers are necessary for providing what may be the only means for assessing a Spanish speaking student's language capabilities and needs. Also, teachers indicated by their responses and suggestions in the survey that their students would benefit from intensive English language instruction. This is very difficult to accomplish in situations where one ESL teacher serves several schools and may only be present to assist students once a week at a particular school. Again, designating positions like bilingual teachers or

ESL as priority and offering financial incentives to prospective qualified personnel, would definitely improve the likelihood of filling such positions. School systems with high numbers of Hispanic migrant students are most commonly located in rural, agricultural regions where there may be very little to attract potential educators to those geographic areas. Financial benefits would be a possible means of encouraging people to relocate for employment in these types of locations.

Parental involvement has been indicated to be of great importance to teachers of Hispanic migrant students at both elementary and high school levels. Naturally, along with increasing parental involvement comes addressing the challenge of bridging languages between educators and parents. This is an area where changes would be implemented at either the district or school level after conducting a needs assessment. This suggestion involves offering English classes to Spanish speaking parents. Community collaboration would be of assistance here, with community members providing instruction, transportation, or childcare to make attendance of these classes more possible for the parents. Schools could have the option of providing instructors, paid or volunteer, along with a facility and public relations to better achieve participation. Guidance counselors and school social workers would be key players in encouraging parents' attendance.

Both literature and research conducted here support the proposal of professional development for teachers in areas that would enhance their teaching practices regarding Hispanic migrant students. Teachers sampled in this study specifically referred to the need for training in ESL strategies as well as in meeting the needs of diverse students. Staff development coordinators or curriculum supervisors could be responsible for conducting specific needs assessments and implementing workshops or training sessions for teachers that

address these two areas. In order for teachers to be most receptive to the training, coordinators should take measures to ensure that this type of staff development conflicts as little as possible with other duties or free time. After training is conducted, supervisors would need to monitor teachers in their classrooms, offering assistance and coaching as need. This would best ensure that training is actually applied and is correctly implemented in real settings. Again, providing this kind of assistance to teachers may involve the need for an increase in positions, specifically master teachers or curriculum supervisors who would be responsible for overseeing the training as well as the necessary follow up.

A proposed change of a different nature could be implemented at the school level. Administrators and guidance counselors, along with teacher input, could consider modifying scheduling practices to group Hispanic students together for the benefit of better instructing. As previously discussed, separating students from their language can have a negative impact on them. This change would be one that ensures that students are not completely isolated from their native language. Also, it would allow for schools to make the best use of their available resources, such as bilingual personnel or materials, in instructing these students.

Purchasing and providing bilingual textbooks and ancillaries for as many subjects as needed would be another valuable improvement for schools and school systems to consider. Students who are literate would then be provided with at the very least some native language support which research has shown to be vital in their academic achievement.

To combat the effects of mobility, schools and school systems could also look at current literature for models found in other geographic areas. Specifically, school systems and curriculum supervisors could create distance credit programs for secondary students by which, with prior approval, they complete assignments packages and return to school at a

later date (when their families return to the area) to test and receive credit for what they have accomplished. A variation on this plan would involve a policy for allowing additional absences for migrant children who are carrying out family responsibilities provided that they complete assignments and other course requirements.

### Barriers to Improvement

There are three major factors that could impede implementation of proposals for improvement of Hispanic education as discussed in this study. Realistically, the most basic and obvious challenge that most educational changes or improvements plans must deal with is the lack of financial resources. Many of the suggestions for improvement as outlined in this study would require additional funding from some source. Adding teaching or assistant positions, supplementing incomes for bilingual or ESL teachers, purchasing bilingual materials, developing and providing specialized teacher training, and providing English classes for parents are all among the recommendations that would involve considerable expense. Although community volunteers may be available to slightly offset some of the costs, school systems would basically be faced with obtaining or re-designating funds in order to fulfill many of the desirable conditions for improvement.

Along with obtaining the financial means to for implementing changes to Hispanic migrant student education, the availability of qualified personnel presents another challenge. School systems such as the ones presented in this study would have to locate and attract bilingual teachers, assistants, and volunteers in order to follow through with plans involving native language support for their Spanish speaking migrant children. Even implementing some of the other changes may require additional staff or would otherwise mean an increase

in the workload of current staff members. Again, the geographic location of many school systems with high numbers of agricultural workers like migrants, may mean that the areas less than attractive to many necessary specialized educators.

The third concern for creating real and positive change for education of Hispanic migrants is more elusive than money or manpower. This barrier is that of attitude. Even with an excess of money and qualified employees available, educational changes achieve the greatest success when accompanied by the support of parents, educators, and decision makers. In order to experience a positive reception among the majority, advocates of native language support as well as other proposals to help Spanish-speaking migrant children, would be wise to educate the instructional and lay communities regarding language acquisition, Hispanic migrant culture, and the migrant experience. Eliminating some of the stereotypical American attitude of cultural and lingual superiority, may result in a greater likelihood of initiating positive change in the lives of the innocent children who are the focus of this study.

#### Suggestions for Further Research

Educating the children of America's Hispanic migrant population clearly presents challenges for areas of our current educational system. Specifically, in rural, economically disadvantaged systems such as those examined in this study, changes for improvements could take place in several focus areas. For curriculum and instructional specialists, these changes may mean adding another dimension to their jobs. Implementations and modifications such as bilingual instruction, bilingual student/teaching materials, and instructing classes composed entirely of ESL students, call for a probable restructuring of the current curricula. At the very least, specialists must work to achieve a means for applying

curricula to meet state requirements while modifying enough to meet the needs of these unique students.

A suggestion for further research made here would definitely point in the direction of the aforementioned curriculum modification and application. Evidence has strongly established a need for improvements to educate Hispanic migrants and has provided obstacles and effective practices in doing so. However, accomplishing many of the proposed best practices would require, among other things, both curriculum and instructional changes. In order to achieve quality results, it would be beneficial for more research to be conducted regarding how to effectively adapt curricula and train teachers in instructing Hispanic migrant children.

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## APPENDIX

### Appendix A. Self-administered Teacher Survey Data Collection Instrument

#### ***SURVEY***

*\*\*\*Your responses to this survey will be used in educational research. Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or stop at any time. Responses will be kept confidential. Please return survey to your principal or his/her designee. Your valuable input is greatly appreciated.*

*Please circle your response to each:*

- How many Spanish speaking migrant/former migrant students are in your class/classes?

1-4                      5-10                      10-20                      21-30                      30+

- Which best characterizes your school's program for ESL students?

ESL pull-out                      Bilingual                      Immersion                      Other

*Using the scale provided, please indicate the extent to which **you believe** each of the following factors negatively affects your instruction of Hispanic migrant /former migrant students in your class:*

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
	<b>doesn't affect at all</b>	<b>affects a little</b>	<b>uncertain</b>	<b>affects somewhat</b>	<b>affects greatly</b>
Language barrier between teacher(s) and students	1	2	3	4	5
Language barrier among students	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of financial resources for specialized materials	1	2	3	4	5
Students starting school late/moving in and out of schools	1	2	3	4	5
Excessive student absences	1	2	3	4	5
Students enrolled below grade level	1	2	3	4	5
Poor student mastery of academic material	1	2	3	4	5
Inadequate healthcare	1	2	3	4	5
Poor nutrition	1	2	3	4	5
Poverty/lack of school supplies/attire	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of pre-school participation	1	2	3	4	5
Unknown vocabulary in assignments/tests	1	2	3	4	5
Difficulty in assessing student ability	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of teacher training in methods for diverse students	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of bilingual personnel	1	2	3	4	5

Cultural differences related to school behavior	1	2	3	4	5
Cultural differences related to academic expectations	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of parental involvement in children's education	1	2	3	4	5
Language barrier between educators and parents	1	2	3	4	5
Low education level of parents	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of transportation for students or parents	1	2	3	4	5

*Using the scale provided, please indicate the extent to which **you believe** each of the following practices is effective in your instruction of Hispanic migrant/former migrant students:*

<b>1</b> <b>Not effective</b> <b>at all</b>	<b>2</b> <b>Slightly</b> <b>effective</b>	<b>3</b> <b>Does not occur</b> <b>in my class</b>	<b>4</b> <b>Somewhat</b> <b>effective</b>	<b>5</b> <b>Very</b> <b>effective</b>	
Some oral instruction provided in Spanish	1	2	3	4	5
Instruction offered strictly in English	1	2	3	4	5
School's ESL program/assistance	1	2	3	4	5
Bilingual volunteers/assistants	1	2	3	4	5
Strategies using written Spanish language (signs, labels, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
Bilingual textbooks/ancillaries	1	2	3	4	5
Cooperative teaching/learning activities	1	2	3	4	5
Use of visual aids (pictures, graphic organizers, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
Total physical response activities	1	2	3	4	5
Hands-on and role-playing activities	1	2	3	4	5
Physical gestures, demonstrations, and movements	1	2	3	4	5
Teacher limits length of utterances and using simple vocabulary	1	2	3	4	5
Teacher speaks clearly, repeats, and refrains from use of idioms	1	2	3	4	5
Teacher encourages participation/ non-threatening environment	1	2	3	4	5
Frequent comprehension assessment/variety of assessment strategies	1	2	3	4	5
Migrant culture incorporated in class activities	1	2	3	4	5
Accommodations to enhance teacher/parent communication	1	2	3	4	5
Peer tutoring	1	2	3	4	5
Community involvement	1	2	3	4	5

*Please indicate the **five** practices or changes **you believe** would most improve the quality of education for Hispanic migrant students in your classes. Please check only five items.*

- Content instruction provided in both English and Spanish
- Bilingual teachers or teacher assistants in all classrooms as needed
- Specialized teacher training provided in teaching diverse students
- Specialized teacher training in ESL strategies
- Specialized teacher training in understanding Hispanic/migrant culture
- Specialized teacher training provided in Spanish
- Mandatory pre-school participation for Hispanic migrant children in the school district
- Additional funding for school-based nutrition and healthcare programs for migrants
- Textbooks and ancillaries provided in Spanish
- Accommodations to encourage parental involvement (transportation/interpreters)
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_