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Role of Teachers in Empowering Migrant Students in Their Education

Maricruz Fragosa

California State University Monterey Bay

Abstract

Many migrant families working in the Monterey Bay areas have to move from one place to another, so their children are considered to be migrant students. The majority of these families migrate to California so their children can continue their education with the support of their teachers. There are existing programs at the national, local and university level to support migrant students. These programs provide the migrant students with the resources needed to succeed in their education. They provide tutors for migrant students in their classroom as well as one-on-one service to them throughout the school year. This senior capstone research project examines the role of teachers in empowering migrant students in their education. The findings revealed that teachers have been an important part in students' success through a literature review, data collection from three interviews, one observation and a survey for Mini Corp Tutors.

Introduction and Background

To begin with, migrant students are children who move schools during the school year to follow work in agriculture, fishing, dairies or the logging industry. (California Department of Education [CDE], 2022) They usually move from one state to another and move from school districts as well. Given the migration of the migrant students, the Migrant Education Program was created which is a federally funded program. It is under the Elementary and Secondary school Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), as amended by the “Every Students Succeeds Act” (ESSA). (California Department of Education [CDE], 2020) Given this, the Migrant Education Program is a part of ESSA and is protected by the state and federal laws. Even though the state does not release any state funds for the program. Overall, the purpose of this program is to assist the states with support for the migrant students, to ensure that they get through their education without being held back. The purpose is to help migrant students receive opportunities to meet the state standards, to help them overcome cultural and language barriers, and lastly to help the children benefit from the state with the resources they offer. (California Department of Education [CDE], 2020). In order for a child to be considered a migrant student, the parent or guardian has to be a migratory worker in agriculture or other similar working conditions as mentioned before.

Teachers have been an important part of students' success. They go through various steps to become a teacher. They go from getting their bachelor's degree to taking a year for their credential, so that they can teach students. What some teachers do not know about until they get their own classroom is the amount of migrant students there are in their classes. As there has been an increase of migrant students, it catches the teachers off guard. (Liu, 2022) They struggle

to find and pull together resources for the migrant students' needs. (Liu, 2022), meaning that most teachers that are going into teaching struggle when they receive newcomers. Keeping in mind that the United States has a history of receiving migrant students. (Liu, 2022). These migrant students' families mostly come from Central and South America. The education system is different everywhere. Students from migrant families face a lot of challenges when attending school (Perez, 2017). These challenges included, from having a language barrier to not knowing how to write. Because of this, many of the migrant students leave school.

Being a migrant student means moving around when your parents are working during the seasonal times. Having this in consideration the student tends to not like going to school as they do not like the change. Most of these students isolate themselves because of their migrant lifestyle. As stated by Perez (2017), these are often the reasons why migrant students do not succeed academically. Having this in mind, teachers have an important role in helping this population of students succeed.

As a future educator, my primary question is: How do teachers empower migrant students in their education? My related questions are as follows:

1. Who are migrant students and where are they coming from? What are the causes of their migration to the U.S.? Are there national migrant education programs to provide services to this population?
2. What does research say about the role of teachers in empowering the migrant students in their education?

3. Are there migrant education programs established at the local level, including the college and university level to provide services to the migrant student population? If they do, what are their services?
4. Given the teachers' role in the migrant education program, how do they empower migrant students in their education?
5. Are there resources available for teachers to support migrant students and empower their students in their education? If there are, what are they?

Literature Review

This literature review found many ways in which teachers could empower their migrant students to succeed in their education. When starting a career as a teacher, there is always a purpose as to why one wants to become a teacher. There is always that thought of wanting to change the world for the better. It is said that teachers are more likely not to hold any negative beliefs about teaching migrant students because it is something that they enjoy doing. (Hanna, 2022) Even though some people may view the migrant students as a challenging population to teach to. This is due to the fact that such beliefs are often linked to the lack of training and knowledge in this population. In addition, the relationship between migrant students and educators is important for the migrant students to succeed. (Cummins, 2011) As these students develop the relationship with the teachers, this type of relationships can promote empowerment which can lead the students to wanting to learn and succeed academically.

The United States has many children who migrate across the country each year to follow their farm worker parents (Free et al, 2016). Migrant farmworker students are among the most disadvantaged groups. (Zarate, 2017) Therefore, they need a lot of support when it comes to

doing well academically. The children of farm workers generally live in households where English is not their first language. (Branz-Spall et al, 2003). Kindler (1994) states that helping to ease the transition of migrant students to a new school is crucial. For instance, if a student feels disoriented or unwelcome, then they will have a difficult time learning. Till this day teachers find ways to be inclusive in their classroom. Teachers have to take into consideration that many of the migrant students come from different countries. Given most migrant students are from Mexican descents, Spanish is the common language for migrant students (Perez et al, 2017). Educators tend to make their classroom accessible and meaningful to newcomer students whose languages and cultures differ from those in their new schools as well as communities (Sharkey et al, 2018). Teachers set up their classrooms in a way that all students can feel comfortable. They do this by decorating their class in diverse forms. If students feel represented when attending school, they are more likely to feel connected with the teacher which will allow the students to learn. Teachers of migrant students need to understand their students first. Migrant students present multiple challenges since public education ignores migrant farmworkers, making it difficult for their children to find connections between their lives and their classroom. (Stevenson, 2016) At the end of the day, in order for the students to succeed teachers make sure that they have everything that is necessary to support this population of students.

In 2013, there was a study in which school districts were asked to teach a literacy program during the summer with migrant students of Mexican descent. The teachers for this program were bilingual. Having bilingual teachers allowed them to bring ideas to the curriculum they would be following for that summer regarding how to engage children in literacy. They wanted to find out what could happen if migrant students are connected with the theme of

migrant children's and young adult literature (Stevenson & Beck, 2015). It is stated that migrant written and illustrated books could serve as identity texts in which students use their academic and linguistic abilities to express their experiences. (Cummins & Early, 2010) When following the curriculum for this study, teachers found that the student's critical consciousness did not emerge from the start, but it evolved as the discussions went on. They started writing their own stories about themselves and continued to enjoy writing. When a student's language, identity, culture and experiences are valued at school, students would try to excel (Stevenson, 2016). Furthermore, teachers who use this strategy are helpful to empower their migrant students as it connects to the students' culture and experiences. This means that it can provide learners with what they need academically. Teachers were able to increase students' critical thinking skills since they used books that migrant students can relate to. Students usually are thrown with books that they hardly understand because of the level of difficulty when it comes to the vocabulary words that are being used. By reading stories where the migrant students are represented, they can learn through representation. The migrant students' reading and writing skills can be improved as reflected in the study where the students ended up writing about their backgrounds comfortably. This means that it is something they enjoyed doing.

There are many ways in which teachers can support migrant students. A school usually has migrant education programs that support all migrant students. These programs allow the teachers to have insights in order to provide support for the migrant students they have in their classrooms. There are a lot of migrant education programs that provide services for the migrant students at the national level. Most of these programs are for elementary, middle, and high school migrant students. The Migrant Education Program is the biggest one in the nation since one out

of every three migrant students live in California. (California Department of Education [CDE], 2020) There are also programs at the local and university level. Some of the programs include: Bilingual Migrant Education Program (BMEP) (an international program between Mexico and the US where teachers from Mexico come to the US to support migrant students during the summer), the Migrant Student Network Information (MSIN) (which is a site for migrant staff), the Migrant Student Information Exchange (MSIE) (which is the technology that allows the states to share educational and health information on migrant children who move from state to state due to their migratory lifestyle and who, as a result, have student records in multiple States' information systems) (California Department of Education [CDE], 2020). One of the popular programs at the university level is the California Mini Corps. The California Mini Corps is an organization at the university/local level in which they strive to support migrant students with their education. It was designed to help with instructional services for migrant students in grades K-12 through trained tutors who are in a college/university setting earning their degree to become a teacher. The goals are to provide tutorial services for migrant students to increase academic achievements as well as to develop future credentialed teachers, so that they know how to work with migrant students. (California Department of Education [CDE], 2019). The Mini Corp tutors have in-services in which they get together to learn more strategies on how to support migrant students as well as the teachers they are placed with. Teachers have found it helpful having Mini Corp tutors in their classrooms as they work closely with the assigned migrant students on a one-on-one basis. Since the tutors are selected because of their backgrounds, the student will feel represented when they see someone who looks like them.

Teacher to teacher relationship is important as it allows educators to work together and help each other when it comes to working with migrant students. Teacher peer mentoring can be an efficient component for professional development when working towards methods to help students. (Keiler, 2023) Teachers believe that parent outreach is important as it is the starting point, so that their children can succeed. This comes from parent teacher conferences or as simple as a conversation at the end of class. Having parents' engagement in the classroom is both beneficial for both the parents and students. As stated by Kindler (1994), parents' involvement is significant. Even in today's society, communication increases the parents' understanding of their child's education needs in addition to enhancing the teacher's understanding of how their migrant students live.

Methods and Procedures

When the semester started I already had something in mind that I wanted to conduct research. I have been working for Mini Corp since my first year at CSUMB and knew that I wanted to know more about the roles of the teachers in order for their migrant students to succeed in their education. Once my topic got approved, I already had an idea of what I wanted to do to collect my data.

For the literature review, there were a lot of articles through the CSUMB database that provided information for my topic. There were other databases like ProQuest and ERIC that had peer reviewed articles that focused more on the education aspect of my research. Google Scholar was also used for my literature review. Since I focused a lot on the Mini Corp program I also used their website which gives an insight of the program and how they work with migrant students.

I have worked with several teachers in different schools. For the data collection I wanted to interview teachers that I have worked with before. I was able to interview three teachers. The teachers are referred to as Teacher A, Teacher B, and Teacher C. Teacher A is a first grade teacher. Teacher B teaches second grade and as for teacher C he teaches sixth grade. They are also from different schools in the Salinas area. I got in contact with them via email. Once I got their response and decision to participate in the interview (See Appendix A ~ Interview Questions to Teachers). Teachers A, B and C were interviewed on the same day.

Another data collection was made through a survey for tutors that are part of the Mini Corps Program. I created questions which were made into a survey based on their experiences with the teachers they are placed with (See Appendix B ~ Survey for Mini-Corps Tutors). The questions were then turned into a survey and were sent to thirty-three tutors and received all thirty-three responses back. The survey was sent through email and completed at an in-service event that the program had.

An observation was also conducted. The observation was made to a first grade teacher who had migrant students for the first time. This teacher will be Teacher D so that there is no confusion with the interviews. She was contacted through email and accepted to have an observation the following week after the email was sent. (See Appendix C ~ Observation of the First-Grade Teacher).

Results and Discussion

For this section, we will review the results of a study in which interviews, a survey, and an observation were conducted to examine the role of teachers in empowering their migrant students to succeed in their education. Being able to work with teachers and tutors for the

findings in the data collection has been interesting. Seeing how each of them works with migrant students allows us to see the different perspectives in how they empower their migrant students so that they are able to succeed academically. Having this in mind, each teacher gives their own answer in ways they help their migrant students succeed and the questions are based on my primary and secondary research questions.

The following paragraphs are structured and organized around the secondary research questions and will include some sub questions that lead to the related or secondary research questions.

1. Who are migrant students and where are they coming from? What are the causes of their migration to the U.S.? Are there national migrant education programs to provide services to this population?

The answers from Teacher A, Teacher B and Teacher C will be synthesized and summarized in a discussion matter for their connected themes. See questions in Appendix A for the sub-questions that were asked during the interview.

How long have you been teaching for? When asking this question, it was necessary to know how many years this teacher has been working for since they will have different points of views depending on how experienced they are. Teacher A, responded, “I am in my fifth year.” (Teacher A., personal communication, October 2023) As for Teacher B, she responded, “I have been teaching here for about nine years” (Teacher B., personal communication, October 13, 2023) For Teacher C, he said, “I have been a teacher for e eight years” (Teacher C., personal communication, October 13, 2023). What these teachers have in common is the fact that they do

not have a huge gap based on experience. This allows us to understand that they could have similar answers for the interview question.

What are the languages spoken in your classroom? Teacher A said that since she is a bilingual teacher, English and Spanish are spoken in her classroom. (Teacher A., personal communication, October 13, 2023). Teacher B teaches in a school where the bilingual program is not available meaning that all the teachers teach in English. Teacher B's response was, "since I cannot teach in Spanish in my classroom, I usually only speak English. But I know that I have English learners, so I tend to translate whatever I teach to them" (Teacher B., personal communication, October 13, 2023). Teacher C is a sixth-grade teacher, so he says that when he teaches, he talks in both Spanish and English as the students he has are older, so they understand a little more (Teacher C., personal communication, October 13, 2023)

2. What does research say about the role of teachers in empowering the migrant students in their education?

What challenges have you noticed that migrant students face inside of school? During the literature review, it was stated that migrant students have a difficult time being taught in the classroom because English is not their first language. To the question, Teacher A answered, "obviously we know that these migrant students do not know a lot of English. Something I see from these students is that they tend to not finish their work. This is a problem because we want our students to succeed. Since I teach in a bilingual school I am able to help them in Spanish but when we have English work they do not tend to finish it (Teacher A., personal communication, October 13, 2023). It was interesting seeing this kind of answer because being a bilingual school means that you are able to help the student both in English and Spanish. Teacher B

responded, “Wow, I see a lot of challenges these students face. For example, when I’m guiding a lesson once it is their turn to do the work they simply copy what I do. I want these students to succeed and I know copying will not lead them to anything. Another challenge the migrant students face is the language barrier between the work that its assigned and how they do it. That’s why most of my lessons include visuals” (Teacher B., personal communication, October 13, 2023). Teacher C says he does notice minor challenges with his migrant students. For example, not knowing enough English. He mentions, “the reason why I say minor challenge is because these are sixth grade students so they are not afraid to ask for help” (Teacher C., personal communication, October 13, 2023). Teacher C answer let us know that these teacher to student relationships are important in order for the migrant students to succeed since they won’t be scared to ask for help.

How do you empower migrant students in their education? With this question getting straight to the point Teacher A stated, “There’s a lot of resources offered to us. For example, what I do be inclusive towards the migrant students I have is letting them know that I have the same background as them. I always like using myself as an example having that mindset of if I can do it then you’re able to do it too. Students have a lot of curiosity so this allows them to feel represented in some way.” She goes on to say that representation is really important for students when it comes to empowering them so that they can succeed academically in their education (Teacher A., personal communication, October 13, 2023). It is something they like to learn about. Teacher B also mention being inclusive of their background with relating it to the lesson. She responded, “I’ve been working with a lot of migrant students since I started working as a teacher answered something that I have learned is making connections with them. They face

some challenges whether at home or here in school, so getting to know them at a deeper level is beneficial since at the end of the day you get to support those students with the needs they need” (Teacher B., personal communication, October 13, 2023). Teacher C said that he tries to connect with his migrant students at a personal level. He states, “Sometimes these students need to feel represented. Also, allowing them to speak their mind. As a sixth-grade teacher, these students have a lot of energy so having them communicate with either myself or their classmates they build relationships”(Teacher C., personal communication, October 13, 2023). All teachers talked about building relationships with their students. I feel that as an elementary school teacher this is necessary since the students need to feel comfortable in their classroom. With this, it will allow the students to want to learn because there is someone in the class who they can trust who in this case is the teacher.

3. Are there migrant education programs established at the local level, including the college and university level to provide services to the migrant student population? If they do, what are their services?

Do you know of any national or local migrant education programs that provide services to this population? I decided to put these questions together because the teachers I interviewed all talked about the Mini Corps program and other MEP services that they are given by their school site. Teacher A stated, “Yes I do. I know about Mini Corps. Something interesting is that you were the first Mini Corps tutor I had in my classroom and believe it or not that helped me a lot. Having a Mini Corps tutor is definitely beneficial because the migrant students get that one on one learning experience which can be helpful to them (Teacher A., personal communication, October 13, 2023). Teacher B and C had similar answers. They said that having programs like

Mini Corps allows migrants students to get that extra help they need and why not do it with somebody that has similar backgrounds (Teacher B., Teacher C., personal communication, October 13, 2023). Having these comments made by the teachers about Mini Corp tutors show how having a tutor in a classroom to support migrants students allow students to succeed. As they have that extra support.

4. Given the teachers' role in the migrant education program, how do they empower migrant students in their education?

For this question, Teacher A goes on to answer, “There’s a lot a teacher can do. For example, hold conferences with parents, talk to parents to get to know them better, having parental involvement in my classroom and provide them with the resources they need. When school starts in August I give everyone materials so that they do not buy anything because sometimes parents might be too busy to buy their children’s materials for school” (Teacher A., personal communication, October 13, 2023).

5. Are there resources available for teachers to support migrant students and empower their students in their education? If there are, what are they?

If we go back to the literature review, many migrant students are not provided with enough resources and parental involvement. This approach will be beneficial for this population of students. Teacher B says, “I usually work one on one with them or in small groups when the students are doing lexia or reading their library books. I also provide resources for the parents which a lot of others educators do.” (Teacher B., personal communication, October 13, 2023). Teacher C also talked about providing support. He states, “I

also stay after school for about an hour just in case anyone needs clarification with something” (Teacher C., personal communication, October 13, 2023). This shows there are many ways in which a teacher can support migrant students. This goes from parent involvement to tutoring after school.

The next section will focus on the survey given to thirty-three Mini Corps tutors and their responses (See Appendix B). The Mini Corp tutors work with 9-12 migrant students in the classroom they are placed at. As a Mini Corp tutor, they have insights on how the teacher works with migrant students. Currently, the tutors work with first, second, fourth and sixth graders. (See Appendix B ~ Survey for Mini-Corps). The amount of migrant students that teachers have in the classroom, based on the survey, is thirteen students making it almost half of the students in their classroom. Some of the insights the tutors gave while working with the teachers are as follows: The teacher focuses on the areas they need the most help in. They communicate with me in what they believe works best for the students to improve their education. They use different visuals, teach vocabulary upfront in big font and have students read it and repeat it after them. They use different sources of technology, such as bilingual videos and screens to review course work. They also have small group interventions to better meet the lower students and pair them with a higher-level student for partner assistance. They also put them in groups to give them extra support. They do different activities for every level of learning. Teachers use words of encouragement, patience, and talk to them in their first language (Spanish). This makes the students feel welcomed and heard, allowing them to be comfortable in the classroom (See Appendix B ~ Survey for Mini-Corps). It seems that

teachers have a lot of ways that contribute to the migrant students' education. Since I know that the Mini Corp tutors are future educators, I also asked them about how will they empower their migrant students in their own classroom. These were some of the responses: "I will give them the resources they need. I will focus on what they need the most help in and see what I can provide for them. I believe many migrant students need resources to enhance their learning at home" (See Appendix B ~ Survey for Mini-Corps). "As a future educator, simple things like letting them borrow books from my personal library or making flashcards they can review will be helpful. Looking or making videos that are not related to what we are learning, but to what they need the most can be of great use" (See Appendix B ~ Survey for Mini-Corps). "Remind them that knowledge is power, and they should never give up on themselves because with great knowledge, they can do many great things for themselves and the world." (See Appendix B ~ Survey for Mini-Corps). "I am taking all the literacy and mathematics strategies with me as an asset. I have learned how to better support my students and allowing them to have group and partner collaborations are beneficial in my migrant students' learning and developments' ' (See Appendix B ~ Survey for Mini-Corps). "Letting them know they are not alone and communicating with their parent to help out." (Survey) "I will always make sure my students have the resources they need, use words of encouragement, remain positive, and patient with them. I will also empower them by teaching them the importance of a growth mindset and that we are all capable of it" (See Appendix B ~ Survey for Mini-Corps). With these responses we know that these migrant students will have a

successful education in the years to come as there are a lot of future educators who are learning on how to support them.

To end the data collection an observation was conducted for a first-year teacher who teaches first grade and had migrant students for the first time. She teaches at a school where the bilingual program is not available meaning she teaches in English. Since many of her students speak Spanish she translates her lesson to Spanish so that they can understand the lesson. The migrant students in her classroom are all mixed up. She decided to mix them up because like that other students will be able to help them. For me, this approach is beneficial because the migrant students will be included. She also uses a lot of positive reinforcement in both English and Spanish. Throughout the observation the teacher supports the migrant students by providing them with handouts, art supplies, markers, flashcards and whiteboards to students. During the day she does one on one and group collaboration with the students. She also includes videos, games, flashcards, and various activities in her lesson. Sometimes students work better visually so I think her approach to start helping migrant students is really a great way to start.

Problems and Limitations

Through the data collection, there some of the problems I encountered was the amount of participants for my survey. When doing the survey, I had initially made it for thirteen people, but when I received the responses back I thought to myself that there can be room for more since I want my data collection to be credible. Knowing this, I had to do something about it because it would be better to have more participants. With less time in my hands, I sent the

same survey to another twenty tutors from the Mini Corps program. Having more surveys done for more people allowed me to make more connections with the answers I was looking for.

Also, the observation made was complicated because it was my first time doing it. That's when I decided to add an outline of how the observation was going to be.

Recommendation

Some of the recommendations I have are for parent and teacher relationships. With this the teacher will be able to learn about the lives of their students outside of school and will help them make connections with the students. In addition, having a student to teacher relationship so that the student feels comfortable being around the teacher. I will also recommend for the teachers to take advantage of the Migrant Education Programs available at their school as well as attending workshops about migrant students. Lastly, being inclusive when arranging your classroom. What I mean by this is making sure that your classroom set up shows inclusiveness and shows diversity because once the students feel represented they will feel comfortable in the classroom.

Conclusion

Overall, this senior capstone research examined the role of teachers in empowering migrant students in their education. Through the use of literature review, teacher interviews, a survey with Mini-Corps tutors, and observation, the result findings revealed that the migrant students need the support of their teacher to succeed academically, so that they can continue

their education. As mentioned throughout this capstone project, there are existing programs at the local, state, university, and national level to support migrant students.

These programs provide the migrant students with the resources needed to succeed in their education. They provide tutors for migrant students in their classroom as well as one-on-one service to them throughout the school year. Through various forms of data collections, it is concluded that there are many ways in which teachers can empower their migrant students to succeed. It can go from building relationships with the students, parent involvement, strategies that fit the students' needs and programs like the Mini Corp that offers tutoring services for this migrant student population.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. How long have you been teaching for?
2. How many migrant students do you have in your classroom?
3. What are the languages spoken in your classroom?
4. What challenges have you noticed that migrant students face inside of school?
5. How do teachers empower migrant students in their education?
6. Do you know of any national or local migrant education programs that provide services to this population?
7. Are there resources available for teachers to support migrant students and empower their students in their education? If there are, what are they?
8. Describe your teaching styles.
9. What can you do in the role of the teacher to support migrant students?

Appendix B

Survey for Mini Corp Tutors

[Link to Google Form](#)

1. How reliable is your site teacher?
2. How many migrant students does the teacher you work with have?
3. What does the teacher you work with do to empower migrant students in their education?
4. What languages do the students you work with speak?
5. Is there any other support besides you that the teacher has in the classroom?
6. What resources does your site teacher provide to you so that you're able to help the migrant students?
7. As a future educator how will you empower migrant students in their education?

Appendix C

Observation of the First Grade Teacher

This observation will be taking place at a school in Salinas in a first grade classroom. With the permission given by the site principal and teacher on October 4, 2023.

Observation:**Strategies:****Questions:**

How does she support the migrant students when teaching ELA?

How does she support the migrant students when teaching Math?

Considerations for migrant students?