

Characteristics of Latina/o Migrant Farmworker Students Attending a Large Metropolitan University

Carlos P. Zalaquett

Patricia Alvarez McHatton

Ann Cranston-Gingras

University of South Florida

Abstract: This article examines research findings from a study of Latina/o farmworker migrant students who have succeeded in gaining access to a college education at a large southern university. Findings reveal students with a strong Latina/o or bicultural identity who attend college seeking a better life, a career path, or to make their family proud. Parents and other family members are the paramount influence in the students' decision to attend college. Specific strategies to help these students pursue a higher education degree are presented.

Resumen: Este manuscrito examina hallazgos de investigación en un estudio de estudiantes migratorios trabajadores agricultores latinas/os que han tenido éxito en obtener acceso a educación universitaria en una universidad grande del sur. Los hallazgos revelaron estudiantes con una identidad bicultural o latina fuerte, los cuales asistían a la universidad en busca de una vida mejor, una carrera profesional, o para darle orgullo a su familia. Padres y otros miembros familiares son la influencia fundamental en la decisión de los estudiantes para asistir a la universidad. Estrategias específicas para ayudar a estos estudiantes a obtener su grado académico superior se presentan.

Keywords: *Latino students; migrant education; higher education; migrant farmworker; academic success; Hispanics; college students*

Latina/o individuals are the largest minority group in the United States (41.3 million) and the largest group among individuals younger than 18 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005a, 2005b; Zalaquett & Feliciano, 2004). More Latina/o students are entering college today than in the past (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001). Despite the fact that the number of Latina/o students in college is increasing, their retention rate has not improved (Sanchez, 2000). In 2000, only 64.1% of all Latina/o 18- to 24-year-olds completed secondary schooling, compared to 91.8% White, 83.7% Black, and 94.6% Asian young adults (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001; U.S. Census Bureau, 2004a). In particular, Latina/o migrant farmworker students continue to lag behind in educational attainment (Morse & Hammer, 1998).

According to López, Scribner, and Mahitivanichcha (2001), "Migrants are one of the most academically vulnerable groups in the United States, constantly faced with economic, health, and work-related problems that translate into lower academic achievement and higher dropout rates" (p. 253). Because of their special characteristics, the majority of the research has focused on the deficits of these students (Trevino, 2004). There is limited research and literature specifically on Latina/o migrant students who have succeeded in entering and attending colleges and universities. With federal efforts under way to leave no child behind, new studies on successful Latina/o migrant students could provide relevant information to U.S. educators, policy makers, and other stakeholders as they promote educational reforms to help this particular group of Latina/o students.

The purpose of this article is to increase educators', counselors', and other school stakeholders' knowledge of Latina/o migrant farmworker students through three methods: (a) review the literature of Latina/o migrant farmworkers, (b) present research findings from a study of Latina/o migrant farmworkers attending a large southern university, and (c) present specific strategies derived from the literature review and the study's findings to help migrant students' education.

The Socioeconomic Characteristics of the Families of Latina/o Migrant Farmworker Students

Latina/o migrant farmworker families experience high rates of mobility, limited English-language proficiency, social and physical isolation, and various work-related health problems (López et al., 2001). The majority of migrant farmworkers are foreign born (8 out of 10) and are predominantly from Latin American countries. More than half (52%) are unauthorized workers, and only 22% of migrant farmworkers are citizens (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, 2000).

Migrant farmworkers represent the poorest group in the U.S. (Guerra, 1979). Approximately 61% live at or below the poverty level set by the federal government (López et al., 2001), with an individual median income of less than \$7,500 per year (Mehta et al., 2000). Their average life expectancy is 49 years of age, compared to the national average of 75 (Smith-Nonini, 1999). In addition, three out of five farmworker families live in poverty today, with a median income of less than \$10,000 (Mehta et al., 2000). Their financial hardships often require migrant children to work to supplement the family income. According to Prewitt-Diaz and Trotter (1990), the need for children to work often competes with educational demands because working children can significantly contribute to the family's income. Children working in commercial agriculture have the potential to earn as much as an adult (U.S. Bureau of International Labor Affairs, 2005). Unfortunately, in this environment, children often work in harsh and dangerous conditions without the appropriate clothing or safety equipment. In particular, children suffer job-related accidents, lung, skin, and

respiratory diseases, back injuries, and permanent physical handicaps and deformities (U.S. Bureau of International Labor Affairs).

In addition, language barriers and educational attainment are concerns for these children and families. Spanish is the native language for most farmworkers (84%; Huang, 2003). Their English proficiency levels vary by birthplace and ethnicity. Mexican-born and other foreign-born Latina/o farmworkers have extremely low rates of English fluency (2%-4%). The majority (73%) received their education in México, and only 21% are educated in the United States (Mehta et al., 2000). Farmworkers present high rates of illiteracy (completely illiterate at 20%, functionally illiterate at 38%, and marginally literate at 27%) in the United States (Mehta et al., 2000). Their median highest grade of schooling completed is sixth grade (Mehta et al., 2000), and only one in five farmworkers has taken an adult education program, including general educational development and English classes. Furthermore, only a small portion of farmworkers have attended university classes (3%) or other classes such as citizenship, job training, and adult basic education (3%; Mehta et al., 2000). Therefore, migrant youth are at risk because factors such as poverty, early job placement, and exposure to harmful work conditions can substantially affect school attendance and academic achievement. In fact, more than one third of young farmworkers are school dropouts, and 17% of children attend school at a grade level lower than their same-age peers (Huang, 2003).

U.S.-born Latinas/os account for only 12% of farmworkers, but 80% of this subgroup are children of farmworkers (Gabbard, Mines, & Bocalandro, 1994). These children do not appear to be locked into the same employment patterns as their parents (Mehta et al., 2000). Most U.S.-born children of Latina/o farmworkers do not work on the farm and are expected to leave farm work in the future. Only 5% of this subgroup perform some farm work at a given time. However, according to Mehta et al., it is hard to know how well the U.S.-born children are currently doing because it has been more than 10 years since the National Commission on Migrant Education studied migrant students' educational achievement and attainment.

Educational Characteristics of Latina/o Migrant Farmworker Students

The migratory lifestyle of Latina/o farmworker families imposes multiple barriers to the educational attainment and academic achievement of their children. Such barriers include mobility and discontinuity in education, strenuous work outside of school and family responsibilities, English-language mastery, social and cultural isolation, extreme poverty, and poor health (Huang, 2003; López et al., 2001). A review of these barriers is presented below.

Mobility

The lives of migrant farmworker students are organized around the harvesting seasons. Each fall and spring, Latina/o migrant students arrive late and leave early

from the academic school year. Because of the lack of synchrony between the family's migration pattern and the traditional school year, migrant students experience considerable disruptions to their education. Even with the support of summer programs, it is often difficult for these students to accrue enough academic credit to stay at grade level with their nonmigrant peers (Kindler, 1995). Migrant students experience problems with records and credit transfers. Some high schools do not have migrant education programs that work to transfer school records, accelerate instruction, and accrue credits. All these migration-related issues can contribute to lower academic achievement and high dropout rates among migrant students (Kindler, 1995).

Work and Family Responsibilities

Migrant families may expect their children to work in the fields or to care for younger siblings when the parents are working (Chavkin, 1991; Martinez & Cranston-Gingras, 1996). Rather than attending school, adolescents can make a significant contribution to their family's income by working or caring for younger siblings (Kindler, 1995). This results in an increased level of absenteeism and contributes to the low graduation rate of migrant students.

Language

Approximately 84% of migrant students come from a Latina/o background, and the main language spoken in their homes is Spanish (Kindler, 1995). Sometimes, the family members communicate using an indigenous language (e.g., Mixteco), although they often know Spanish as well (Mehta et al., 2000). Spanish remains essential as a means to converse with parents and older relatives. Parents usually have limited proficiency in English, and they often rely on their children who have learned English in U.S. schools to translate for them, placing their children in adult roles and situations at an early age (Sue & Sue, 2003). In the absence of appropriate instructional services, limited proficiency in English may impede learning and achievement.

Social and Cultural Isolation

According to Anderson and Cranston-Gingras (1991), migrant families face social discrimination because of their ethnic characteristics, poor living conditions, and lack of education. Because of the type of work and language differences, migrant farmworker families often occupy a low status in communities where they live (Romanowski, 2003). Furthermore, the language barrier isolates these families and creates tension with local residents (López et al., 2001). As a result of this, many

migrant children sense that they do not belong, and their feelings of inferiority are often reinforced by their peers' rejection and teasing. This social isolation hinders these children's academic development and plays a significant role in promoting low self-esteem (Romanowski, 2003).

Parents

Parents of migrant students are poor, work long hours, and live in substandard housing (Mehta et al., 2000). They tend to come from rural areas of Latin American countries, and they often have a marginal level of education (U.S. Bureau of International Labor Affairs, 2005). These parents are not familiar with the U.S. school system and requirements to graduate (Hyslop, 2000). Therefore, many of these parents may not be able to advocate for their children's educational needs or rights.

Poverty and Health

In addition to migrant families' poverty levels reported above, many families are affected by the cost of moving around the country to follow their seasonal jobs. Many migrants and their families move to their working areas with little or no money or food (Kindler, 1995). Furthermore, they work extremely long hours without resting, experience excessive physical strain, suffer malnutrition, and are regularly exposed to toxic chemicals and/or disease-carrying animals. Not surprisingly, migrant families experience health disparities compared to the general population (Huang, 2003; U.S. Bureau of International Labor Affairs, 2005). Few migrant children receive appropriate medical care (U.S. Bureau of International Labor Affairs, 2005). Generally, migrants have higher rates of tuberculosis, pneumonia, asthma, emphysema, bronchitis, and intestinal parasites (Huang, 2003). Thus, many migrant students suffer educational disadvantages stemming from poverty and poverty-related health problems that can directly affect academic achievement by decreasing the number of days in school (i.e., lower attendance), thus reducing the time they are academically engaged.

Schools and the Educational Needs of Latina/o Migrant Farmworker Students

The unique educational needs of Latina/o migrant farmworker students and the risk factors they face demand that educators and schools develop effective ways to serve this population of students (Chavkin, 1991; Guerra, 1979; Sosa, 1996). However, many schools are not prepared to serve these students. According to Kindler (1995), public schools are usually prepared to meet the needs of a relatively stable population

of students residing in the geographic areas they serve. Thus, many schools are unaware of or have difficulty meeting the special needs of students who are highly mobile, poor, and in need of support. Further complicating service to these students is the absence of academic and/or social support services in some schools and the entanglement of interstate and intrastate practices and policies that may make it difficult for educators to track down records and credits and to match student progress from one curricula or school schedule to another. These unique characteristics and circumstances of Latina/o migrant students may reduce their chances of receiving encouragement from school personnel to pursue high school graduation and to develop postgraduation plans (Salinas & Franquiz, 2004).

Perceptions of Latina/o Migrant Farmworker Students

According to Trevino (2004),

Unfortunately, what has been written about migrant students has been based on disadvantaged, deficit, or at-risk theories of academic failure. That is, much ado has been made about the negative effects of Mexican-origin culture, the lack of adoption of "American" values, and the supposed lack of high aspirations. (p. 159)

The hardships that surround the migrant lifestyle, the negative ways in which they are perceived, and the difficulties of some school systems to serve migrant students seem to have a detrimental impact on their educational advancement. Research has long suggested that these hardships and barriers result in low academic achievement, high attrition, and other school-related problems for migrant students (Cranston-Gingras & Anderson, 1990; Guerra, 1979; López et al., 2001). Despite decades of reform and mandated programs created to serve migrant students, the U.S. public school system does not seem to meet their educational needs (Norrid-Lacey & Spencer, 2000; Salinas & Franquiz, 2004). Research by Manaster, Chan, and Safady (1992) concluded that Latina/o migrant farmworker students born in México to Mexican parents belonging to large, rural, and poor families tend to be low performers. Prewitt-Diaz, Trotter, and Rivera (1990) suggested the existence of "the culture of migrancy" (p. 117) that perpetuates the intergenerational cycle of migration that ends up in their Latina/o children being migrants too. In addition, there is a general perception that Mexican Americans, especially those from lower socioeconomic background, do not value education (Valencia & Black, 2002).

Furthermore, Morse and Hammer (1998) suggest that to succeed in college, migrant students must (a) complete high school with adequate preparation for college, (b) apply and be accepted to college, (c) find scholarships or other funding to attend college, and (d) progress through college to graduation. However, the barriers these students face may prevent them from attempting or completing this process.

Study of the Characteristics of Latina/o Migrant Farmworker Students Attending a Large Metropolitan University

Despite the barriers that migrant students face, some migrant Latina/o students succeed in gaining access to a college education. However, specific student characteristics and factors associated with access to postsecondary education are not well known. This article reports the results of a research study exploring the characteristics of migrant Latina/o students and identifying sources of support that have enabled them to gain access to an academic program at a large urban university. This information may help develop programs to increase the number of migrant students attending college.

Description of the Study

The following research questions guided this study: (a) What are the psychological characteristics of Latina/o migrant students? (b) Why are they interested in education? (c) What are their perceptions of their high school experience? (d) What are their attitudes toward learning and study habits? (e) Which of the school resources do they perceive as most important in helping them make the decision to attend college? and (f) What recommendations do these students have to help other migrant Latina/o farmworker students attain a college education?

Method

Participants

The 2003, 2004, and 2005 cohorts of Latina/o migrant farmworker students enrolled in the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) at a large, urban university participated in this study. CAMP is a federal program that assists students from migrant farmworker backgrounds in completing their 1st year of college. Approximately 15 to 20 Latina/o students per year participate in the program. A total of 52 (88.0%) students completed the assessment instrument. Respondents included 34 (65.4%) females and 18 (34.6%) males. The average age of the participants was 18.2 (range = 18-19, $SD = 0.425$). Most of the participants ($n = 42$, 81.5%) were the first in their families to attend a postsecondary institution (first-generation college students). Most of the participants were freshmen ($n = 43$, 89.6%), 3 (6.3%) were sophomores, and 2 (4.2%) were juniors. Four students (8.4%) did not answer this question. The majority of the students ($n = 42$, 80.8%) were born within the United

States. Those (10, 19.0%) born outside the United States have lived an average of 12.7 years in this country. The majority of the students, 27 (52.0%), reported feeling more Latina/o than North American, 23 (44.2%) reported feeling equally Latina/o and North American, and 2 (3.8%) reported feeling more North American. All the students were single. The majority ($n = 41$, 78.8%) lived in the university dormitories, 8 (15.3%) lived with their parents, 1 (1.9%) lived alone, and 2 (3.8%) responded "other." None of the participants belonged to a fraternity or a sorority. Their average academic load was 13.5 semester credit hours (range = 9-18, $SD = 1.8$), and their average working hours per week was 6.1 (range = 0-25, $SD = 9.3$); 2 (2.4%) students did not answer this question. Regarding parents' education, most of the fathers (39, 76.0%) did not attend school or did not complete high school. Most of the mothers (37, 72.0%) did not attend school or did not complete high school. Only 12 of the fathers and 13 of the mothers obtained a high school diploma or higher. One participant (2.4%) did not provide information regarding his or her father's education.

Instrument

A 98-item questionnaire was used to assess students' perceptions of their sources of help and motivation to pursue a college education. The main author, in collaboration with an expert in recruitment and retention of diverse students and a senior psychology researcher, created the questionnaire. The first section of the questionnaire solicited demographic information, such as gender, ethnicity, place of birth (e.g., United States, abroad), and number of credit hours currently being taken. This section also included two questions exploring the extent to which students identify themselves as North American and as Latina/o, using a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (*a little*) to 5 (*very much*). The second section of the questionnaire asked about psychological characteristics of the participants using questions such as "I feel very comfortable with who I am, or I worry considerably about mistakes." Participants were asked to respond to each of the 16 questions using a 4-point Likert-type scale from 1 (*not true*) to 4 (*extremely true*).

The third section of the questionnaire explored students' interest in education using questions such as "Who talked to you about the importance of education?" and "Did somebody act as your role model?" The fourth section of the questionnaire explored students' high school experience using questions such as "What helped you the most to succeed in high school?" and "Was high school easy or hard for you?" This section also focuses on the students' strengths by asking questions such as "What personal qualities helped you to succeed in high school?" In addition, students were asked about their perceptions of their teachers using statements such as "Please describe three characteristics of your favorite teacher in high school" and "Please describe three characteristics of your favorite Latina/o American teacher in high school." The last part of this section included 10 statements such as "My high

school made clear efforts to understand the cultural assets and contributions of Latina/o students” and “My high school classmates valued diversity.” Participants were asked to select responses that were true of their high school. The fifth section included 4 questions regarding the students’ decision to attend college. Participants selected those responses that were true of their decision to attend college. In addition, this section listed 10 potential resources that helped students in their decision to attend college (e.g., school counselor, college recruiter). Participants were asked to respond using a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (*not available/not important*) to 5 (*extremely important*). The sixth section on the questionnaire listed 18 statements about study habits (e.g., “I studied very hard in high school,” “I frequently asked questions in class,” and “I enjoyed taking a difficult exam more than an easy one”). Participants were asked to select those that were true of their study habits.

Procedure

A packet containing a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study and confidentiality of responses and a copy of the anonymous survey was given to all the students attending the first orientation meeting of the CAMP program in 2003, 2004, and 2005. As an incentive to respond, participants were informed that 5 persons returning completed surveys would be randomly selected to receive a \$20.00 award to be used for any academic purpose. The research’s procedures and instruments were approved by the university’s Institutional Review Board.

Results

A primary goal of this research was to study the characteristics of migrant Latina/o students and to identify sources of support that enabled them to gain access to an academic program at a large urban university. Descriptive statistics were used in the analysis of the data. Results are summarized by categories reflecting the research questions stated above.

Psychological Characteristics of the Participants

Most of the participants perceived themselves as very comfortable with who they are ($n = 46, 88\%$) and were very motivated to achieve their goals ($n = 48, 94\%$). Approximately 53% ($n = 28$) indicated that they actively seek information, whereas 19 (37%) indicated that they do it to some degree. Most of them strongly aspired to become an authority in their professional fields ($n = 42, 82\%$), and the majority perceived themselves as very competitive ($n = 25, 47\%$) or somewhat competitive ($n = 20, 38\%$). The majority described themselves as having some leadership role ($n = 29,$

56%) or a strong leadership role ($n = 15, 28\%$) in their peer groups. They saw themselves as stricter ($n = 22, 42\%$) or somewhat stricter ($n = 26, 50\%$) about judging whether situations or actions are right or wrong than others. Most students worried about making mistakes ($n = 48, 92\%$). The majority reported being able to focus on tasks ($n = 29, 58\%$). The majority of participants ($n = 31, 59\%$) indicated that they manage to turn in class work and assignments on time, although many students ($n = 46, 88\%$) indicated that they procrastinate. The majority of the participants ($n = 41, 80\%$) worked during high school, although many ($n = 21, 40\%$) reported that they were not required to financially help their family. Most of the participants ($n = 39, 75\%$) reported being able to cope with rejection. Most of the participants ($n = 40, 77\%$) indicated that they discuss their problems with family members.

Interest in Education

Participants reported that they attended college to be successful ($n = 22, 42.3\%$), achieve a better life ($n = 21, 40.4\%$), be educated ($n = 13, 25.0\%$), or make their parents proud ($n = 13, 25.0\%$). The majority of the respondents ($n = 39, 75.0\%$) indicated that their parents and families talk to them about the importance of education. Other sources of support reported by the participants included teachers ($n = 20, 38.4\%$) and counselors ($n = 11, 21.1\%$). Regarding individuals who inspired them the most, most participants reported parents ($n = 27, 51.9\%$), and a few reported teachers ($n = 15.4\%$), siblings ($n = 7, 13.5\%$), or grandparents ($n = 4, 7.7\%$). Several students ($n = 28, 53.8\%$) reported that they did not have any role models, whereas some included parents ($n = 18, 12.0\%$) and siblings ($n = 10, 19.2\%$) as their role models. Students indicated that they learned about college opportunities and the admission process from counselors ($n = 23, 48.0\%$), teachers ($n = 12, 23.0\%$), and migrant advocates ($n = 8, 26.9\%$). Information regarding financial aid and scholarships was provided by counselors ($n = 25, 44.2\%$), teachers ($n = 12, 23.0\%$), and migrant advocates ($n = 14, 15.4\%$). Finally, students reported being informed about college prerequisite courses, college tests (SAT/ACT), and honor, International Baccalaureate, or Advanced Placement classes by counselors ($n = 26, 50.0\%$), teachers ($n = 18, 34.6\%$), and migrant advocates ($n = 6, 11.5\%$).

Perceptions of High School

Most participants ($n = 38, 73\%$) indicated that their schools did not have enough Latina/o teachers. More than half of the participants ($n = 29, 56\%$) reported that their school made no efforts to teach cultural understanding and acceptance or to understand the cultural assets and contributions of Latina/o students ($n = 27, 52\%$). They also reported that their school did not provide them with opportunities to appreciate their culture and individuality ($n = 28, 54\%$). However, the majority of the participants

($n = 28$, 54%) reported that their schools made efforts to understand culturally diverse parents and extended families and to ensure their participation in the student's academic and social life in school.

Regarding their teachers, most of the participants ($n = 43$, 83%) believed that their teachers were approachable and open, and the majority ($n = 32$, 62%) reported that their teachers showed genuine respect for and interest in Latina/o students and their culture. In addition, the majority of the respondents ($n = 31$, 60%) indicated that their classmates valued diversity.

Furthermore, most participants ($n = 42$, 81%) indicated that their school provided them with the same experiences and opportunities as non-Latina/o students, and the majority of participants ($n = 39$, 75%) reported that their schools made them feel like a valued and worthwhile member. Finally, most of the participants ($n = 36$, 69%) reported experiencing no racial discrimination at their high school.

Study Attitudes and Habits

The majority of the participants ($n = 36$, 69%) liked their high school academic coursework and reported they sat in the front of the class ($n = 28$, 54%). For most participants ($n = 43$, 83%), grades were extremely important, and the majority ($n = 36$, 69%) liked their schoolwork to be neat and well organized. Furthermore, they reported that flunking out of high school would have ruined their plans ($n = 48$, 92%). Nevertheless, about half of the participants ($n = 29$, 56%) did not enjoy studying, the majority ($n = 33$, 63%) did not study very hard while in high school, and most ($n = 39$, 75%) did not enjoy taking difficult exams and were not interested in mathematics ($n = 41$, 79%). These findings are similar to those reported by the national High School Survey of Student Engagement (2005).

The majority of participants ($n = 36$, 69%) could initiate a study session promptly and accomplish most of their learning goals for that session ($n = 34$, 65%). However, they usually did not plan their schoolwork ahead ($n = 32$, 62%), and most ($n = 34$, 65%) reported cramming before examinations. The majority of the participants (42, 81%) did not use group study and did not ask questions in class ($n = 32$, 62%).

Most participants ($n = 39$, 76%) expected to be an outstanding student in college. In addition, most ($n = 49$, 94%) of the participants indicated that they would like to help other Latina/o students.

Most Important Resources in Their Decision to Attend College

Table 1 shows the respondents' most important resources that helped them to make the decision to attend college. The majority of the participants identified their families as the most important resource in their decision to attend college. About half of the students identified friends, college printed materials, college Web sites, and

Table 1
Most Important Resources in the Decision to Attend College

Resources	Importance					
	Important		Somewhat Important		Not Important or Not Available	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Family	47	90	3	6	2	4
Friends	27	52	16	31	9	17
College printed materials	26	51	18	35	7	14
College Web site	26	50	15	29	11	21
School counselor	26	50	10	19	16	31
Admissions decision day	24	47	13	25	13	27
College visit	21	41	15	29	15	30
College recruiter	18	35	12	21	22	43
College advisor	14	27	10	19	28	54
College open house	11	21	14	27	27	52

school counselors as important. Fewer than half of the participants reported admissions decision day, college visits, or college recruiters as important. Finally, college advisors and college open houses were identified as important by fewer than a third of the participants.

Discussion

The results of the current study indicate that most of the participants have a positive view of themselves. These students are comfortable with who they are and perceive themselves as very competitive and proactive. Most of these students are the first in their families to attend college and consider a career outside of farm work. Furthermore, many students stated that they want to become a leader or authority figure in their chosen occupational field. They are strict with themselves, and they do not want to make mistakes in terms of schoolwork or life in general. In fact, the students reported that they do not like to study or take difficult tests, but they submit their class work and assignments on time. These students present a contrast to the one third of young farmworkers who end up dropping out of school and the many migrant students who attend school at a grade level lower than their same-age peers (Huang, 2003). These results are similar to those reported by Duron (1995), which included personal factors, such as the individual's motivation and beliefs about self-efficacy, to explain migrant students' decisions to attend postsecondary education institutions.

The findings of this study clearly add to the efforts of Valencia and Black (2004) to refute the misconception that Mexican Americans, especially those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, do not value education. Furthermore, they suggest that Latinas/os from different cultural backgrounds perceive education as valuable. These students attend college to obtain an education, which they see as a means to a better life, a path to a career, or a way to make their parents and family proud.

In addition, most of these students can cope with rejection. This ability may protect them from feelings of inferiority, which are often reinforced by peers' rejection and teasing (Romanowski, 2003). In fact, these students do not report some of the feelings of inferiority or isolation that hinder students' academic development and promote low self-esteem (Romanowski, 2003). Furthermore, they felt that they belong in their schools and were not socially isolated.

Another important finding is that most of the students strongly identify with their Hispanic or Latina/o cultural heritage or feel they are equally Latina/o and North American. The students perceived that their high school valued their Latina/o heritage and accepted and provided for them as they did with other students. Most of these students did not feel discriminated against. Also, they perceived that their teachers had a genuine respect for and interest in Latina/o students and described them as caring, open, and approachable. These results are similar to those characteristics of influential teachers compiled by Ruddell (1999), which include sensitivity to "individual needs, motivations, and aptitudes" (p. 5). Many students also perceive that their classmates valued diversity. The qualities of the school, teachers, and classmates seem to play an important role in the success of Latina/o migrant farmworker students. These findings relate to research that found that students whose teachers received professional development training to enhance their efficacy with diverse students improved their school performance (Thompson & Joshua-Shearer, 2002).

The students also reported that their schools made efforts to understand the characteristics of Latina/o parents and extended families and to ensure their participation in the student's academic and social life in school. The importance of these school actions has been extensively supported in the research. Reaching out to Latina/o parents and families and collaborating with them has been associated with academic achievement (Hyslop, 2000; Trevino, 2004; Zalaquett, 2006; Zalaquett & Feliciano, 2004). Furthermore, the fact that all of these students are involved in the CAMP program clearly indicates that they have been assisted at least to some degree by educators who understand the migrant community and what they need to be academically successful.

As suggested by Salinas and Reyes (2004), advocate educators use an approach and understanding that promotes success in those high school migrant students they serve. These educators usually act as mediators who understand how to change or circumvent barriers or detrimental schooling practices that interfere with migrant students' progression to higher education. Usually, they act as agents of change that promote alternative schooling experiences for their students, such as college visits.

They also collaborate with other resources found within the migrant educational community on behalf of their students.

Despite their positive views of their schools, students perceived that (a) there is a need to increase the number of Latina/o teachers working at their high school and (b) there is a need for school personnel to make more efforts to understand the cultural assets and contributions of Latina/o students and to provide them with opportunities to appreciate their own Latina/o culture and individuality. These results suggest a need to teach school personnel so that they gain a better understanding of different cultures. It is important to help them develop cultural competencies that they can effectively use in everyday life. To improve students' scores, skills, and achievement levels and thereby their preparation for college, all schools could benefit from the inclusion of diverse school personnel to facilitate the delivery of culturally competent services. This could also promote the beginning of ongoing cultural awareness and diversity training to strengthen the school's ability to serve diverse student populations, such as migrant farmworker students. Thus, this information may be brought to the attention of college recruiters and administrators so that they can develop programs to attract a diverse group of applicants.

Bempechat, Graham, and Jimenez (1999) propose another possible explanation for the high achievement of these students. They use achievement motivation theory (Weiner, 1974, 1986) to explore the ways in which high and low achievers differ in their approaches to learning. According to this theory, the beliefs about the causes of success and failure explain why some students embrace academic challenges whereas others shy away from them. Weiner (1974, 1986) suggests that those students' explanations about why they succeed in school fall into three broad categories: innate ability, effort, and external factors. Some students may attribute their failure in school to lack of ability (internal attribution), insufficient effort on their part (internal attribution), and external factors such as bad luck (external attribution). Those students who attribute success to internal factors, such as ability and effort, tend to do better in school than those who attribute it to external factors. In their study, Bempechat et al. (1999) found that higher achievers attributed their success to high ability, but they did not believe that failure was because of a lack of ability. In contrast, regardless of ethnicity, the lower achievers believed that success was because of external factors and that failure was because of a lack of ability. Most of the participants in this study seem to rely more on personal attributes of success. Furthermore, the fact that many of them did not report any of the commonly observed barriers reported by other researchers (e.g., discrimination, isolation) may be partially explained by their focus on personal-internal factors of success than by the complete absence of these barriers.

Parents and other family members are the paramount influence in these students' decision to attend college. As reported by other researchers (Trevino, 2004; Zalaquett & Feliciano, 2004), almost all of these Latina/o students attribute their success to the support and influence of their families, particularly their parents. In fact, they talk about the importance of education with their parents and other family

members. They report this despite the fact that many of their parents are poor and have little or no formal education, and many parents do not speak English fluently or at all. The lack of information or experience with education suggests that the parents of high-achieving migrant students do not involve themselves in their children's education in the same way as other parents (Trevino, 2004). Therefore, educators can collaborate with migrant parents to support and advance the academic achievement of Latina/o migrant farmworker students.

In addition, students reported that friends, college printed materials, college Web sites, school counselors, admissions decision day, and college visits were important resources that influenced their decision to attend college. Few participants identified a college advisor or college open house as important for their decision to attend college.

Unexpectedly, there were some topics that the students did not report, which was found to be the case in other studies (Lagerwey, Phillips, & Fuller, 2003; Trevino, 2004). None of the students mentioned religious or spiritual factors in helping them to achieve high school completion. This is an unexpected finding because many Latinas/os are religious. In addition, none of the students reported role models who experienced educational success beyond high school. Although unexpected, some researchers have suggested that the majority of Latina/o students do not have role models that speak to academic success (Zalaquett & Feliciano, 2004).

Finally, the study includes 19% of participants born outside the United States, predominantly in México, who gained access to a college education. Participants were recruited to be part of a federal program specifically for children of migrant farmworkers. The experience of these participants contradicts previous research that suggested that Latina/o migrant farmworker students born in México from poor Mexican parents living in rural areas tend to be low performers (Manaster et al., 1992). Furthermore, it seems that these particular students were able to break free of the intergenerational cycle of migration as suggested by "the culture of migrancy" concept introduced by Prewitt-Diaz and his colleagues (1990, p. 117).

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations to the study that affect generalizability. The study relies on self-reported data. Self-reported data may not be accurate because of recall problems. The limitations of self-report data should not be overlooked, and future studies should incorporate additional sources of data (e.g., information from teachers or family members), which may serve as useful approaches to corroborate or refute the students' self-report measures. Another limitation is the sample size. However, there are only a limited number of college programs where Latina/o migrant farmworker students pursuing an academic degree in higher education could be found. Another limitation of the study is the location of the sample. Studying Latina/o migrant farmworker students in Florida may not generalize to other states.

Nonetheless, given the mobility of this population, the database used in this study provides an opportunity to examine self-perceptions and attitudes in a sample that reflects the population of Latina/o students in the United States. These limitations should be considered in planning subsequent research projects.

Strategies for Improving Migrant Student Performance

Based on the review of the literature and this study's findings, the following recommendations are presented.

Understand the Students' Cultural Values

According to Romanowski (2003), migrant farmworker students strongly value family loyalty and the duty to fight and defend family members. Also, the findings of this and other research (Minority Student Achievement Network, 2002) suggest that Latina/o migrant farmworker students value education. Sometimes these deeply ingrained values are misunderstood or conflict with teachers, curriculum, and school rules (Romanowski, 2003). Teachers, counselors, and administrators who familiarize themselves with their students' values will be able to understand the students' educational needs and provide a more effective education. Furthermore, they will be able to dispel the myths that Latina/o migrant farmworker students do not value education.

In addition, some migrant students experience difficulties speaking with unfamiliar people. Also, some are not accustomed to looking directly at an authority figure or an older person. They may feel more comfortable looking down or away. This is a sign of respect in some cultures (Sue & Sue, 2003). They may smile or nod, seeming to indicate that they understand what is being said, when, in reality, they do not. Educators could address this by making eye contact and smiling or going over to the student's desk to offer individual coaching and supporting. Some students may be apprehensive about speaking out in a group, either because the teacher—who is seen as a respected “elder”—is present or because they may not have anything specifically meaningful to say. Silence may be a sign of respect rather than a sign of an inability or a refusal to participate. Many migrant students prefer to work cooperatively on assigned tasks. Others may prefer to work individually. Misunderstandings because of communication problems or cultural differences are quite common. Therefore, educators could promote the learning of and practice using multicultural competencies in school.

Multicultural Training

Schools should promote multicultural training and practices. The results of this study clearly revealed that the majority of the participants perceived that their

schools made no efforts to teach cultural understanding and acceptance, to understand the cultural assets and contributions of Latina/o students, or to provide them with opportunities to appreciate their culture and individuality. Furthermore, according to Thompson and Joshua-Shearer (2002), "In order to improve students' scores, skills, and achievement levels, and thereby their preparation for college, all educators could benefit from ongoing cultural awareness and diversity training" (p. 14). Therefore, it is important to have cultural awareness and diversity training for educators (Reyes & Fletcher, 2003; Thompson & Joshua-Shearer, 2002) through in-services and workshops. Teacher preparation institutions would benefit by finding ways to bring this information to the attention of prospective school administrators and teachers so that they can understand the role the acquisition of multicultural competences plays in teacher effectiveness when educating this population. Also, it is important that teacher education programs instruct students to understand and gain multicultural competencies that will help them to effectively educate students from this population.

Recruitment and Hiring of Teachers From Diverse Backgrounds to Provide a Better Learning Environment for All Children

The findings of this study clearly showed that Latina/o farmworker migrant students perceived a need to increase the number of Latina/o teachers working at their high school. Role models for children of their own race or ethnicity are especially important (Zalaquett & Feliciano, 2004). Students from diverse backgrounds, especially those who are disadvantaged, need the support and counseling of those who have similar cultural backgrounds to affirm their belief in themselves and their traditions. Increasing the numbers of diverse teachers is important because they can serve as positive role models. These teachers can help migrant students realize that they are capable of achieving their goals and can hold them to high standards. Teachers from diverse backgrounds are also more likely to have insights into the special problems that students from diverse backgrounds face in school and into shaping lesson plans or choosing curricula that take cultural differences into account. With a majority-White teaching force, some students from diverse backgrounds may come to think that they cannot aspire to the same profession or the same academic standards as their mentors. Furthermore, students from low-income backgrounds might not have out-of-school opportunities to meet professionals of their own race or ethnicity. Thus, teachers from diverse backgrounds can play a pivotal role in the educational lives of migrant children by providing support and understanding and helping them both personally and professionally succeed.

Promote the Development of Positive Internal Attributions

Positive internal attributions increase student achievement (Bempechat et al., 1999; Weiner, 1974, 1986). In fact, most of the students included in this study relied

on personal attributes of success. Lower-achieving Latina/o students, regardless of ethnicity, are at risk if they believe that their poor performance results from a lack of ability. This belief may impede the learning process because if students do not think they have at least some ability, it makes little sense to them to invest effort in their learning. The challenge for teachers is to help their students maintain a healthy balance between believing that they have the ability necessary to learn and knowing that effort will help them maximize their ability.

Parent Outreach

It is important for schools and teachers to include Latina/o migrant farmworker parents in the school community. Parents were identified by the students in this research as the most important factor in their pursuit of a college education. Parent involvement and support is significant for a child's initial adjustment and continued performance in school (Chavkin, 1991). Communicating with rural migrant parents may pose challenges for classroom teachers: Parents may be illiterate, may not speak English, may not have a telephone, and may live a great distance from the school or may not wish to be visited. However, communication will increase parents' understanding of their children's educational needs and enhance teachers' understanding of a migrant child's lifestyle (Chavkin, 1991). Learning about these parents and communicating with them may foster collaboration. Educators can consult with a bilingual person to help them identify what language is used in the home and how knowledgeable parents are about the school system. The bilingual person may be an English as a second language teacher or aide, a migrant education specialist, or a volunteer. With the help of a bilingual person, notes can be sent home or a phone call can be made to maintain contact with the parents. Migrant parents want what is best for their children and will appreciate if open lines of communication are established and maintained to keep them informed about their children's progress in school. In addition, because Latina/o migrant farmworker parents play the most significant role in their children's decision to pursue education, educators can promote parents' understanding of the educational system.

Formal Mentoring Programs

Schools can set up mentoring programs (Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). In addition, setting up tutoring or mentoring programs with local colleges might provide a way to introduce high school students to a college atmosphere and to students pursuing a college education. Latina/o migrant farmworker students in college programs could tutor high school migrant students and/or introduce them to college programs. Most of the students involved in this research indicated that they would like to help other Latina/o migrant farmworker students.

Peer Tutoring Programs

Another means of increasing Latina/o migrant farmworker students' interest in education is to encourage their participation in peer tutoring programs. A Latina/o migrant farmworker student who enjoys tutoring others might be encouraged to help his or her peers in an established program.

Internet-Related Activities

Involvement in activities oriented to facilitate the use of computers and navigate through cyberspace offers migrant students an effective way of learning about college education. College Web sites were reported as an important resource affecting the students' decision to attend college. Therefore, it is important to encourage migrant students to participate in computer-related activities, especially those that take place during regular school hours, because access to a computer outside school may pose obstacles because few migrant families own computers.

Continuity of Schooling

Migrant students usually move with their families as many as two or three times each school year. This means that migrant students—who are primarily of Mexican, Central American, or Puerto Rican origin—may not return to the same school the following year. These students—whose English proficiency is often limited—face the challenge of adapting to a new school, new teachers, and new classmates many times each year. Therefore, the school system's ability to maintain the educational continuity of these students is vital for their success. Collaboration with programs such as Migrant Interstate programs and Virtual School initiatives such as the Migrant PASS Program are essential.

Establish Partnerships

Establishing cooperative partnerships with colleges and universities, businesses, and professional societies to encourage Latina/o students to succeed in high school and pursue college studies is important. Programs that provide research opportunities, summer work experience, career guidance, and mentoring are proving most useful in helping students gain a better appreciation of education and learn that it is possible to achieve a higher education degree.

Scholarship and Financial Aid

Finally, because it is well known that migrant farmworkers represent the poorest poor, providing scholarships to attend college will help reduce the burdening costs

of education. Local businesses or organizations could be recruited to provide money for partial or full scholarships for students from diverse backgrounds interested in attending college. In addition, counselors and other educators can work with migrant students to help them find and apply for financial assistance.

Conclusions

Migrant farmworkers continue to be the most vulnerable of all the groups in the United States. Migrant families' lifestyles will not significantly change in the near future because of the nature of seasonal farm work and their economic needs. However, educators can have a profound effect on migrant students' education. Understanding the life of migrant families and communicating with parents can help teachers and school counselors get acquainted with the unique characteristics, qualities, and needs of this population. Knowledge about the culture and values of migrant families can help educators facilitate migrant students' learning.

The current study provides educators with insights into the perceptions of students from migrant farm work families. If used wisely, this information can empower educators, policy makers, and teacher-training institutions in their quest to improve the quality of instruction that they provide to these students. Learning about these successful Latina/o migrant farmworker students may help dispel the myth that they are not interested in education and that they need to give up their cultural background to move forward. These students were able to pursue an education and still identify themselves as Latina/o or bicultural. As suggested by Trevino (2004), they personally and academically succeeded without giving up their Latina/o heritage. Furthermore, paraphrasing Trevino, contrary to Prewitt-Diaz's (1990) prediction, these 52 students, representing 52 Latina/o migrant farmworker families, were able to break away from the "culture of migrancy" against all odds. By doing so, these students speak strongly about what is possible, and they send a message, "Si, podemos educarnos." "Yes, we can achieve an education."

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Carlos P. Zalaquett, PhD, is an assistant professor in the Department of Psychological and Social Foundations at the University of South Florida. His research and teaching focus on mental health issues affecting diverse populations. He studies the characteristics of successful Latina/o students in higher education.

Patricia Alvarez McHatton is an assistant professor in the Department of Special Education at the University of South Florida. Her research interests include cultural competency, teacher preparation, and school experiences of Latinas.

Ann Cranston-Gingras, PhD, is a professor of special education and director of the Center for Migrant Education at the University of South Florida. She directs the federally funded High School Equivalency Program for Youth from Migrant Farmworker Families and the College Assistance Migrant Program. She conducts research and teaches in the areas of special education and migrant education.