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A Comparison of the Language Achievement Levels of the Mexican-American Migrant Child with that of the Mexican-American Non-Migrant Child

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A Comparison of the Language Achievement Levels of the Mexican-American Migrant Child with that of the Mexican-American Non-Migrant Child

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Many schools in the State of Washington, and particularly in the Yakima Valley, have a considerable student population of Spanish speaking students. These students mainly fall into two categories, migrant and ex-migrant. Special emphasis has been given these two groups by the Federal government in the form of money grants to school districts who have applied for help through Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Association Act.

The Center for the Study of Migrant and Indian Education at Toppenish, Washington, is a project of Central Washington State College. This agency provides school districts with valuable services to better expedite and co-ordinate their efforts to help the migrant and Indian child. This agency also serves as a "think tank" for innovative approaches to helping these children.

The transient agricultural worker has long been an integral part of the American farm labor picture. The need for the harvest-following laborer developed as agricultural plants became larger and as diversified farming gave way to one crop specialization (11:22). The harvest cycle of the Western United States is such that a laborer is forced to move from one area to another about every four months if he wishes to be employed somewhat regularly. Moving naturally denies

him regular employment in the normal sense of the word.

Transient farm workers are not covered by unemployment compensation. When a harvest cycle is interrupted in one area and the worker is forced to move, his income is also interrupted (1:78). Moving involves extra expenses and this, coupled with interrupted income, results in great financial burden to the worker.

A high percentage of the transient workers are American citizens of Mexican heritage. They have many cultural similarities within this ethnic and occupational group. Three cultural facets that are of great importance are:

1. An overwhelming majority are of the Catholic faith.
2. The family size is larger by United States' standards.
3. Their first language is a form of Spanish.

It is not inconceivable that Catholicism has affected the size of the farm workers' family. That should not, however, over-shadow other influencing factors. The transient farm worker who is blessed with a large family can readily see that in time his income will increase noticeably (2:73). The children of these workers are expected to be in the fields, in some capacity, when they reach six and seven years of age. There is also a type of built-in social security for the father and mother because traditionally these families have very enduring family ties. There are a multitude of reasons for these ties, the most

obvious being language. The Mexican-American farm laborer speaks a polyglot language. It has a Spanish base mixed with Indian and English terms. Quite often the older members of a family will be unable to speak English or they will claim to be unable to speak it. This naturally further isolates them, as a group, from the mainstream of American society. Social isolation, either imposed or self-imposed, usually indicates a difference in values.

The transient Mexican-American farm laborer has his occupational and ethnic brother, the Mexican-American farm laborer who is not transient. By not moving in search of work and by partially intergrating with the mainstream of community life, the non-transient farm laborer has some value differences with the transient worker. By moving from transient to non-transient status he has partially intergrated himself into a community. He accepts the value of regular school attendance. He accepts the short range income loss involved so long range goals may be achieved by his children. By remaining in one area he can see other members of his ethnic group move from field work into more stable occupations. An achievement level past bare subsistance has become an attainable goal to the non-transient (12:10).

In Sunnyside, Washington, one finds many Mexican-American farm laborers. About one half of this group are transient workers and the other half are ex-transients who are now classed as non-transients.

Most educators and lay people of Sunnyside School District feel that the children of transient farm workers are low achievers in school. Absenteeism, apathy, constant moving, and different values are generally agreed to be influencing factors.

There is no acceptable evidence that indicates ethnic inferiority exists. It is, however, possible that occupational groups within an ethnic group may show some statistically significant similarities in performance on a standardized achievement test (9:56).

The fact that the Federal Government has financed Headstart and Migrant Educational Programs in Sunnyside indicates that the children of Mexican farm workers in general, and migrant children in particular, are considered to be educationally deprived by the Federal government. If the assumptions, either implied or expressed, made by the Federal government and the Sunnyside educators are correct regarding achievement, then the Mexican transient children should show a statistically significant lower level of achievement than Mexican non-transient children.

THE PROBLEM

This study was undertaken in order to determine what differences exist between Spanish speaking migrant children and Spanish speaking non-migrant children in the area of Reading and Word Knowledge.

REASON FOR SELECTION OF THE PROBLEM

Each fall and spring the Sunnyside schools receive many migrant students. These students usually leave the valley in November and return in late March. Each year the number migrating shrinks but the total student population of Spanish sur-named students rises. This occurs as families leave the migratory stream to be permanent (non-migrant) residents of our city.

This writer has long felt that the high drop out and failure rate of the migrant student is a fault of the migratory nature of the family rather than the lack of ability of the child.

If, by a comparison of migrant and ex-migrant children, this assumption would prove correct, then new and more accelerated programs would appear to be justified. Teachers, aids, students and the town's lay citizens may well view the "problem" rather than the "child" with alarm.

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

1. Only children attending Lincoln Elementary School were used.
2. Only students with Spanish sur-names were used.
3. About 25% of the students with Spanish sur-names attending Lincoln were tested.

4. Only students between the age of 11 years 9 months and 12 years 3 months were tested.
5. Not all children tested were actually promoted into the upper intermediate grades but may have been socially placed there.
6. Only the Reading and Word Knowledge section of the Metropolitan Achievement Test were used.

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

1. That the migrant child will rate lower than the non-migrant child in word knowledge.
2. That the migrant child will rate lower than the non-migrant child in reading.
3. That all children tested were tested under the same conditions.
4. That the differences between the two groups can be tested and that the results will be significant.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Migrant

For the purpose of this study a migratory child of a migratory worker is a child who has moved with his family from one school district

to another during the past year in order that a parent or other member of his immediate family might secure employment in agriculture or in related food processing activities.

Ex-Migrant

For the purpose of this study, a child of a worker who was a migrant as defined above but no longer migrates.

Test

For the purpose of this study, the Reading and Word Knowledge section of the Metropolitan Achievement Test.

Spanish American

For the purpose of this study, a child who by his last name and general appearance would lead one to the belief that the child's ancestory is a mixture of Spanish and Indian (i. e., Mexican or Mexican-American).

Lincoln School

For the purpose of this study, the Lincoln Elementary School of Sunnyside, Washington.

Pupil Orientation

For the purpose of this study, to provide information and experiences of the child prior to administering a test.

OVERVIEW OF REMAINDER OF THESIS

Methods and Procedures

This chapter describes the test given and procedures used; criteria used to select the two groups of students and the data collection process.

Test Selection

The test selected for this study was the Reading and Word Knowledge section of the Metropolitan Achievement Test.

Description of Test

The Reading and Word Knowledge sections of the Metropolitan Achievement Test were used as the test vehicle. Conditions and instructions were as nearly identical as possible for the two test groups. The manual of instruction was followed precisely before and during the testing.

Collection and Analysis of Data

1. Each test was machine scored by the Metropolitan Achievement Testing Corporation.
2. Each group's average percentile was established.
3. Each individual's percentile score was recorded according to group and by rank.

4. The differences in Reading and Word Knowledge for the migrant and non-migrant group were assessed by use of the H statistic, the Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance by ranks, as explained by Siegel (10:184-194). The Kruskal-Wallis H test is simple, rapidly calculated and possesses power-efficiency of 95. 5 per cent as compared to its parametric counterpart.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The migration of Spanish American families toward areas that afford seasonal work in agriculture or agriculturally related fields has been beneficial to everyone but the migrant. He comes at an opportune time to help the local economy and leaves at almost the precise time that, had he not moved on, he would have become a bothersome social and economic burden on the local state government. He contributes to the well being of each community where he performs a seasonal task but usually fails to receive any governmental benefits which the permanent residents are accustomed.

McWilliams states that,"they do not know the stability and security of being a real, intergral part of a community, and therefore enjoy almost no social participation of any kind." (11:354)

It is for that reason that Haney refers to the migrant family as, "America's forgotten people." (8:5)

A migrant family originally entered or were placed in the migrant stream as the result of a need for labor and their lack of training for a job that offered security and stability. They stayed in the migrant stream because being a part of that stream automatically insured that they could never stay in one place long enough to receive

enough training to qualify for work other than what they were already engaged in.

Markoff asserts in the NEA Journal that:

> No one should fail to realize, however, that the element which more than any other has tended to perpetuate the low economic status of migrants and other farm workers is the undeniable fact that their children rarely get enough education to permit their advancement above their low economic level. (10:180)

A self comforting attitude among some of the established citizens of communities that employ migrant labor is that people are in the migrant stream because they like it. This writer has found no evidence to substantiate that line of thought. It is not man's nature to be unattached. Coles supports this view by the following statement:

> It is utterly part of our nature to want roots, to need roots, to struggle for roots, for a sense of belonging, for some place that is recognized as mine, as yours, as ours. (4:139)

Open hostility toward migrants is not generally observed. Subtle forms of hostility may well exist unintentionally disguised as something else entirely. Closing schools during harvest is not intended as a hostile act but its effect is the effect of hostility. Markoff points out that,"migrant children on the move have a hard enough time in obtaining an education, and closed school houses only add to their hardships." (10:181)

It goes without saying that when one group imposes hardships on another group, the net effect is a form of hostility, however, unintentional.

A communities eagerness for migrants to leave after the harvest may be very subtle and not a conscious, deliberate tactic at all. A homeless, unemployed group in an established community upsets the comfort of that community. The community is not interested in making room for a new and different culture. Most migrant adults have learned this fact and deal with it as such. Migrant children all too soon learn that they are a member of the "out" group. Bowker asserts that, "hostility in the community at large may well be mirrored in the microcosmic society of the school." (3:55)

It is curious indeed that an economic act with hostile undertones may be a blessing in disguise for the migrant child. As farm labor organizations become more effective, the farmer speeds up the processes of mechanization of his farm. The process of mechanization is a cost cutting procedure, however, the speed up of that process is a hostile act that has forced a very noticeable slow down in the total number of migrants. These migrants did not disappear, they just stopped migrating. The migrant becomes an ex-migrant and achieves what most men strive for--roots.

THE MIGRANT CHILD IN SCHOOL

The migrant child is a rootless person in a constantly changing cultural and social environment. He may not be proficient in the English

language or in Spanish. He is called a bi-lingual child but he may be nearer to a non-lingual status. He is more comfortable in Spanish which he considers his "own" language but he may well be able to read and write English whereas he can only speak Spanish.

His achievement in an English oriented school is rarely up to that school's "standards". His one comfort is the sure knowledge that in a few days or weeks he can leave the scene of his latest failure. His travels about the country are of little educational value. He has learned to cope with situations and new people but nearly always from a basis of failure. His exposure to music, art, drama, and good books is almost non-existant. Wright states that,"cultural neglect places a child in an educational vacuum." (18:50)

This vacuum was recognized and resulted in the compulsory school attendance law. However well intended, it had little impact except to force people to find ways to circumvent it.

McWilliams states,"so far as migratory children are concerned, the compulsory school attendance law might just as well never been enacted." (11:245)

In another statement he says, "Education is in competition with beans in this country, and the beans are winning out." (11:173)

This condition may be due in part to parental indifference, however, I would suspect that parents of migrant children have as much

love for their off-spring as does any other occupational group. Coles asserts that, "rather obviously migrancy makes regular attendance, even if very much is desired by a particular set of parents for their children, next to impossible." (4:39). The migrant parent's expectations for his child may not be high because he himself can see no break in the merry-go-round of migrancy.

The migrant child is constantly entering new academic situations in mid-stream. He is not comfortable in the English language and misunderstandings can and do occur as Tireman points out. "When a child cannot understand the teacher, he can only guess at her intentions." (16:78).

Although the migrant child may appear to be functioning acceptably in English he is thinking in Spanish. What we interpret as slowness of the child's mental processes may actually be a very normal translation lag involving four to six translations concerning a single question or statement by the teacher. Tireman states, "the child may not hear his parents use English words and he may not have the opportunity to use the English words that he learns at school." (16:86).

One may rationalize that this is the problem of the student and his parent and that it is their responsibility to work it out. Evidence indicates that our task should be oriented to any need rather than pre-set

curriculum guided. Stevens reminds us that,"one is reminded frequently enough that the school has a personal and social as well as an academic task. But it is equally important to recognize that the very interests of curricular learning itself, the passage between home and school, must be eased as much as possible (15:165).

Generally, if it is to have validity, the concept for training adjustment must be broadened to deal effectively with instructional and cultural factors.

Personnel at the Center for Migrant and Indian Education assert that, as migration shows to a near halt in the not too distant future, educators have a unparallel opportunity to meet their commitment to the migrant child. They can take an economic and social class that is now with out great expectations and, keeping their culture intact at an acceptable degree, allow them to experience hope for a better life. The migrant child can be a child of hope if educators resist the temptation to drag him out of his past by the scruf of his neck. They can get him out of the dirt and give him hope but they must not insist that he leave behind his songs, stories, and language.

RELATED STUDIES

This writer could find no studies of this nature. The personnel at the Center for Migrant and Indian Education attempted to assist me

by contacting several schools and agencies in the southwest regarding related studies. They reported to this writer that no such studies existed to their knowledge.

Chapter III

RANDOM SELECTION OF MIGRANT AND NON-MIGRANT GROUPS

Lists of all students of Lincoln Elementary School with Spanish sur-names and who fell within the age requirements was compiled. The migrant and non-migrant names were placed in separate lists. School attendance records and migrant records were used to verify the students migrant status. The non- or ex-migrant group was verified by school records of attendance.

From these two lists this writer selected at random 20 migrant and 20 non-migrant students. The random selection was accomplished by utilizing a stratified random sampling. This system was used to insure an even distribution of boys and girls in each group. Each of the four groups would after the random selection, consist of ten units.

The fish bowl method was used in each case to satisfy the requirements of a random sample.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The purpose of this study was to determine the basic Reading and Word Knowledge skills of a group of migrant Spanish American students and a group of non-migrant Spanish American students. Each group was comprised of 20 students who were attending the Lincoln

Elementary School of Sunnyside, Washington. The testing was done during the month of September, 1970.

CHOICE OF STATISTICAL TEST

The Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance by ranks, known as the "H" test was employed to determine whether the test was different or from the same population. Siegal describes the procedure in the following manner.

> Sample values almost invariably differ somewhat, and the question is whether the differences among the samples signify genuine population differences or whether they represent merely chance variations, such as are to be selected among several random samples from the same population. (10:184)

In this study the ranking procedure proceeded with the high test score being assigned the highest rank. The formula is:

$$H = \frac{12}{N(N+1)} \left(\sum \frac{R_J^2}{N_J} + \frac{R_J^2}{N_J} \sum \right) - 3(N+1)$$

AVERAGE PERFORMANCE OF THE TWO GROUPS

The following chart is a graphic description of the performance of the migrant student group and of the non-migrant students on the Reading and Word Knowledge section of the Metropolitan Achievement Test.

The figures shown represent the average percentile of each group. The difference in the scores of the two groups is shown on the right hand column.

	MIGRANT	NON-MIGRANT	DIFFERENCE
READING	27.9	39.9	12%
WORD KNOWLEDGE	25.8	37.5	11.7%

WORD KNOWLEDGE

MIGRANT	RANK	NON-MIGRANT	RANK
55	37	43	31
34	25.5	50	34
23	13.5	34	25.5
26	16.5	55	37
24	15	21	12
13	6	51	35
4	2	36	27.5
11	4.5	32	23
32	23	28	19
15	7	45	32
26	16.5	20	10
85	40	49	33
7	3	18	8
40	30	39	29
11	4.5	55	37
20	10	20	10
36	27.5	66	39
23	13.5	32	23
30	21	28	19
N=20	$\sum$R+317.0	N=20	$\sum$R=503.0

$H = 7.10$

$X^2 = > .01 < .001$

Is significant favoring non-migrants

READING

MIGRANT	RANK	NON-MIGRANT	RANK
86	39.5	56	32.5
40	28.5	60	34
6	4.5	35	25
5	2	35	25
8	6	30	22
20	13	50	30
5	2	35	25
23	15.5	30	22
40	28.5	5	2
9	7.5	73	37
27	19	23	15.5
52	31	37	27
6	4.5	17	12
9	7.5	56	32.5
86	39.5	83	38
15	11	27	19
27	19	30	22
12	9.5	23	15.5
12	9.5	23	15.5
70	35.5	70	35.5
N=20	ΣR=333.0	N=20	ΣR=487.0

$H = 4.23$

$X^2 = > .05 \quad < .02$

Is significant favoring non-migrants

RESULTS

It was established that in each case the findings were significant to an acceptable degree.

The results of the Reading section of the test were significant at the $>.01$ $<.001$ level.

The results of the Word Knowledge section of the test were significant at the $>.05$ $<.02$ level.

The average percentile for the two groups showed some wide differences between the migrant child's achievement in the two tests used and that of the ex-migrant.

In each case, the operational hypothesis was accepted and the null hypothesis rejected.

The results of the Reading section of the Metropolitan Achievement Test showed that the migrant student group's average percentile rank is 27.9 compared to 39.9 for the non-migrant group. The difference being 12 percentile points favoring the non-migrant group.

The Word Knowledge test results showed a remarkable similarity to that of the Reading test. The non-migrant group's percentile was 11.8 points higher than that of the migrant student group. The averages were: migrant 25.8, non-migrant 37.5.

In each case the migrant students group scored below 35 percentile points. Thirty-five percentile points is considered by the testing company to be the breaking point that determines whether an individual or a group

achievement is cause for concern or not.

In both tests, the ex-migrant groups percentile average was below 35 percentile.

Chapter IV

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

If we can make the assumption that the ex-migrant scored, when he was a migrant, at about the same level as did the migrants tested in these statistics it becomes apparent that changing from migrant to ex-migrant status had some very real benefits.

It is this writer's opinion that it was not the status change in itself that resulted in better test scores but rather the spin-off benefits that accompany a succession of migrancy.

The feeling of being a permanent resident changes the ownership of many things, if not in fact at least in thought. As a permenent resident, it is now "my school," "my town" and "my house". A child whose parents drop out of the migrant stream finds that he is recognized in school and on the playground by the other non-migrant students, aids, and teachers. He knows that he will be in on a variety of school and community affairs. He and his family are in the process of establishing a routine which may include eating regularly and attending school regularly. He is establishing a personal discipline that comes with any routine. With the establishment of the routine of a permanent resident we see some other positive factors entering the child's life. He can think of the future in terms of his progression through "his" school system. He can think in terms of

taking part in social events, intramural or interscholastic teams and various clubs and organizations of the school. He is in the process of gaining identity.

Identity has many facets. It is important for any person, and in particular the migrant child, to be recognized as a person of worth. As a migrant you are of worth to a community if you don't arrive too early and don't stay after the work is done. This type of situation can only destroy an individual or a group. A child who is no longer a migrant has gained some identity in that we must deal with his problems rather than succumb to the temptation of waiting a couple of months for him to move on and take his problem along. Politicians, doctors, coaches, teachers, and preachers all know that, as an ex-migrant, he is here to stay and he automatically becomes a full time person. He has identity.

With his new found identity the ex-migrant is introduced to accountability. His success and his failures become part of his contribution to one community. Where as the school can no longer wait two months for him to move on with his problems he can not escape a failure by the prospect of moving. His records, good or bad, follow him and are his responsibility. He is dealing with a fairly stable and constant peer group rather than one that is constantly changing.

The flexibility of children, not yet with deeply ingrained life styles, allows them to make the shift from migrancy to that of a permanent

resident rather painlessly. The migrant parent poses a different problem. The migrant parent does not always view the schools with favor. The compulsory attendance laws and its enforcement forces the child out of the field where he earns money and into school where he spends money.

The short range view of a dollar today holds considerable allure. Before we can bring the migrant parent to view the long range values of education, we must establish a "trust level" with those parents. There is very little chance that they will come to the school people. In view of that the only alternative is for the school people to go to the parent. The problems of the child cannot be ministered to if the parent resists.

We know that the migrant child has little chance, as a migrant, of competing with the resident child in school. We also know that, if we expect to succeed, we must deal with the child and the parent. We also know that, by leaving the migrant stream, a child's academic achievement does improve. We also know that incorporation of cultures is a time tested way of improving and strengthing a culture. I recommend that we take the following steps to improve the lot of the children who are now members of migrant families.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Instigate federal programs for job training for heads of migrant families so that they can have the skills necessary to stop migrating.

2. The schools to establish an effective parent involvement program aimed at, in particular, the migrant and ex-migrant parents.

3. That the schools actively promote programs of cultural inclusion in the overall school plan.

4. That the remedial programs now in existance be upgraded and expanded.

5. That teachers and administrators be compensated for special training that they elect to take that would help implement items 1, 2, 3, and 4.

6. That federal monies be used to ease the transition for a family who wishes to leave the migrant stream.

7. That systems of accountability be set up to determine whether a school district, or any other agency, is producing results that are of value.

8. That the School Boards and the school employees identify and define their commitment to the migrant child.

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