This research builds upon scholarship that explores the unique needs of Latina/o migrant students and the teachers who serve them inside and outside of the school environment. Situated within the overlapping fields of migrant education, critical literacy, and Latina/o critical theory, this narrative examines the practices and perspectives of three teachers, each with more than a decade of experience teaching migrant students. The purpose of this study is to give educators, administrators, and community members who work with migrant students additional insight into the literacy acquisition process and unique challenges of working with this population.

Research has generally shown that migrant students encounter cultural, linguistic and racial barriers within school systems that can hinder their academic progress (Tatto et. al., 2000; Valencia, 2002; Romanowski, 2002; Green, 2003; Cranston-Gingras, 2003; Vocke, 2007; Torrez, 2013). Literacy is one area where migrant students continue to underperform on state assessments compared to their non-migrant peers. By offering detailed portraits of teachers in a summer migrant education program (SMEP) in Michigan, this study highlights classroom practices and critical reflections that reveal both barriers and pathways to the literacy needs of migrant students.

As school systems nationwide continue to experience an influx of migrant students who are expected to perform on state assessments at the same level as their
peers, the outcomes of this study are also relevant for public school teachers and administrators who wish to close the achievement gap. While this study revealed pedagogical practices that were unique to each case study participant, it also revealed ‘common critical practices’ shared by all of the teachers. These teachers’ practices were influenced by internal and external factors including their own and their students’ backgrounds, practices over time, and curriculum and assessment materials. Finally, this study serves as a model for stakeholders in migrant education to consider how their students continue to be disenfranchised by existing laws, policies and practices.