

Multicultural learning environment for Mong children in the California North Coast : home and school collaboration

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ABSTRACT

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MULTICULTURAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR MONG STUDENTS IN THE CALIFORNIA NORTH COAST: HOME AND SCHOOL COLLABORATION

California North Coast is a suburban city with a population approximately 27,000. In 1984, the Mong people, an ethnic minority subgroup from Laos, established their community on the California North Coast. Presently, the Mong population decreased to about seventy families in 1998. They came to the United States as political refugees as early as 1976 due to their involvement with the United States' Secret Army in Laos during the Vietnam war. Since the Communist government in Laos declared genocide on the Mong people, they escaped to Thailand and resettled in the United States. Not all of the Mong families were initially resettled in the California North Coast but they moved there as second migration from other cities and states. Other families came directly from the Thai refugee camps in Thailand. There were approximately 130 Mong families in the city of California North Coast in 1993. With limited jobs in the area, many families left the California North Coast in search of employment in other states. Since the majority of the Mong parents did not have any formal education, this has created problems for themselves and their children due to their lack of knowledge about and experience with education.

This study examines an after-school program and multicultural activities for Mong students at an elementary school in the California North Coast and its implication for home-school collaboration and/or partnership learning environment. The author wants to know the kinds of communications and learning environment during school, after-school and/or at home that Mong parents and teachers had developed

collaboratively to provide opportunities for Mong students to succeed in their education.

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Within the context of qualitative research method, this study ethnographically interviewed nine teachers, nine Mong students and nine Mong parents. Also, the author reflected on past experiences and data collection from 1993-1998 in the school district and the Mong

community. This study examined the teachers and Mong parents' responses to the education of Mong students.

This study revealed that school personnel, Mong parents and Mong students work well together when there are trusting relationships. If educators create a warm welcoming school environment that respects the Mong culture and appreciates Mong parents' struggle living in the United States, this helps the Mong families to have less fear about school. The more Mong parents know about school, the greater involvement they have in their children's education. The after-school program that was studied provided positive reinforcement to Mong children's education. The Mong children who participated in the after-school program had less trouble with their schooling. They remained connected to their home language and culture. The after-school program allowed Mong parents and school personnel to gain personal experience with each other's cultural values. The author also found that a home environment and school environment which reflect on both the students' home culture and school culture are important learning environments for the success of Mong children's education.

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Introduction p. 1

School and home environments today play a very important part in children's education. The growing number of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in public school across the United States demonstrates that educators and language diverse parents must work collaboratively. This will make it possible for the children to have an educational opportunity to explore and to build positive self-esteem, confidence and motivation in both school and home environments. Culturally and linguistically diverse students bring with them unique cultures and languages into their classroom. The strength and weakness of their academic performance in school rest on home experiences. Children bring the ideas, feelings, strengths, and weaknesses of their homes into their life at school (Berger, 1995). Language minority children go to school with very different levels of school preparation. Some were born and have lived in the United States all their lives; others are recent immigrants still experiencing the shock of adapting to an entirely new culture (Lewis and Doorlang, 1991). Some come to school well prepared because their parents might have had a good educational background or were familiar with the United States' education system. Others lack this advantage. Some were lost in their education, especially the first generation students who were recently resettled in the United States or were born in a family that had no formal education in their past.

It is important for educators to have a broader perspective and to become sensitive to the different minority students, their education, socioeconomic background and home environment issues. Yet, all parents, regardless of their socioeconomic conditions or their home

language and culture, deserve to be recognized as creators of knowledge, as people capable of sharing their life experiences and engaging in reasoning processes with their children (Ada & Campoy, 1998). Each racial minority group may have a different view and learning expectations for school depending on their home culture. Educators must not draw quick conclusions on what students can or cannot do in school. p. 2

The Mong people are an ethnic minority group from Laos. They resettled in the United States as political refugees as early as 1976 due to their involvement with the United States' Secret Army

in Laos during the Vietnam War. The communist government declared genocide on the Mong people. The Mong were prosecuted for political reasons. Then, they escaped to Thailand and came to the United States (Thao, 1994 & 1999).

Teachers, administrators and Mong parents need to build a strong partnership and work collaboratively with each other to establish a proactive goal to overcome the depressed state of Mong children's education. As indicated by research, formal education is not a common practice to the Mong and some culturally diverse parents (Koki, Onikama and Hammond, 1998). Educators must involve Mong parents to make them feel comfortable when they enter the school ground. The public school system in the United States is a traditional institution that is foreign to the Mong families (Jordan, 1993).

Mong parents need support by school personnel to help them understand the public education system in this country and make their transitional paradigm from oral tradition. Their experience of a traditional life-style back in Laos does not prepare them to involve in the American public school system. Mong parents may need to learn to understand the role of parent involvement in their children's education. It may also require them to make some significant adjustments to the

p. 3 United States education system. However, it is important to hear the Mong parents' concerns in order to address their need in school. Educators may need to recognize that Mong parents are not familiar on how to get involved in their children's education. They can become active as advocates for Mong parents to bridge these gaps.

Most importantly, teachers need to be supported with incentives to work with parents (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990). Learning to working with Mong parents or culturally and linguistically diverse parents does not happen overnight. It takes time and commitment from the school personnel and family (Navarrette, 1996). Violand-Sanchez, Sutton, and Ware (1991) stated clearly that these are challenges which neither schools nor families can do alone. They must support each other.

Background

There is a small Mong community living in the California North Coast. California North Coast is a small city with a population of approximately 27,000. Some of the Mong families came to the California North Coast as a second migration from other cities or states. They resettled in America at a different city or state first then moved to the California North Coast. Others came directly from the Thai refugee camps in Thailand. There were 130 Mong families living in California North Coast in 1993. With limited jobs in the area, many families left the area in search of employment in other states. The Mong population decreased to seventy families in 1998.

The majority of the Mong parents did not have any formal education in the past. This creates problems for them and their children. Mong parents were struggled to act on the role of parent-involvement and

provide support for their children's education. The Mong children had difficulty in balancing their education between home and school environment. They did their best in school to make a connection between these two environments. p. 4

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine an after-school program at Westside Elementary School in California North Coast and its implications for a home-school collaborative and/or partnership learning environment. The Mong Literacy and Homework Helper after-school program began in September 1994. This program incorporated various multicultural activities for Mong students. This project investigates the innovative approaches to communication between Mong parents and school. It also looks at the home-school nurturing environment supportive to Mong children's education. The program was running from 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. on Monday and Wednesday. It provided one hour and thirty minutes Mong literacy and the other one hour and thirty minutes for homework help. The Mong language class continued during the weekend with Mong culture, music and dance workshop. The ages of the students attending the program ranged from seven to twenty-five. During 1997-98 academic year, there were 142 Mong students enrolled in this program. Westside Elementary School is a fictitious name used for the school throughout this study.

Research Questions

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Education was a new experience for the majority of Mong parents living in the California North Coast. Most of the Mong parents were farmers and lived in a traditional pre-literate society in Laos. They practiced an oral culture for thousands of years. Due to their lack of formal education, when they resettled in the United States, they were not familiarized with U. S. school system on how to get involved in their children's education. This lack of formal educational experience created a major problem for Mong families.

Through qualitative research using ethnographic interviews of Mong parents, students and teachers, the author wants to know what kind of communication and learning environment during school, after school and/or at home can help Mong parents and teachers to work collaboratively to provide opportunities for Mong students to succeed in their education. This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What kind of environment would be supportive of Mong students' education success?
2. What kind of collaboration do Mong parents, teachers, and administrators need to engage in, to help Mong students succeed in their education?
3. What kind of academic activities should the Mong students engage in at school and at home?
4. What are some of the current challenges of communication between Mong parents and school?
5. Are after-school or weekend programs, such as homework tutoring, and culture and language workshops, important for Mong students and parents?

Scope of the Study

Rapid growth of Mong student enrollment in the California North Coast City School District occurred mostly at Westside Elementary School. The author attempts to present some of the most significant issues faced by school administrators, teachers, and parents in the education of Mong children at that school. By studying how this school built bridges between the Mong and American cultures, the author hopes to provide public school districts, educators and Mong parents an understanding of how the school and home can collaboratively work together to support the education of Mong students. Also, discussed are the key values to prepare Mong children to succeed in their education.

Limitation of the Study

This study was limited to the Mong community, Westside Elementary School and in the California North Coast City School District. It was restricted to the groundwork of collaboration between school and Mong parents to support Mong children's education. This study will include information insight gained from interviews with nine teachers, nine Mong students and nine Mong parents. Based on an empirical data from interviews together with a data base collected from 1993-1998 in the school district and the Mong community, the author hopes this research will provide a microcosm of Mong children's education in the public school system. However, the findings from this study can not be generalized to other Mong communities and public school districts in the United States.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used by the author throughout this study. Readers need to refer to the definition in order to have a clear understanding on the author's discussion.

After-School Program

A program run by parents and teachers to provide mutual support for students who need help with homework, through tutoring, role models and mentors. It is a place for parents, educators and community members to share vital professional and cultural information to enrich children's education. It is an after-school hours program for community members to participate and share their important skills with children.

Home-School Collaboration

The joint efforts of educators and parents to work together establishing common interests, goals and values to support children's education. It is an involvement that requires both school personnel and parent commitment.

Mong

This term may have been written as “Hmong.” However, the term “Mong” is preferred. The use of the term was firmly supported by linguists who have conducted research within the historical and comparative methodology. The term “Mong” does not deviate much from the other term “Hmong.” Linguistically, there are two major dialects spoken in the Mong society: the Blue Mong and White Hmong dialects. The term “Mong” will be used exclusively through this research over the term “Hmong.”

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

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Refer to individual language, culture, sex, race and social class group.

Multicultural Learning Environment

An environment in which the whole child is educated to develop a capacity for life-long learning about all cultures and languages. This environment needs to contain meaningful information and connect the child through his or her educational experience with both his/her home culture and the school culture without misinformation or fear. It provides educational opportunity for Mong children to become biculturally and crossculturally competent in this diverse society.

Pre-literate Society

A society which has no written language. All values are passed down orally from generation to generations.

Transitional Paradigm

An adjustment of a person's life-style from a pre-literate to a literate society through a transformative struggle involving culture, language and education.

Organization of the Project Reports

This Master's thesis consists of five chapters: an introduction and four chapters as following. The introduction provides a brief background information on the Mong in the California North Coast, purpose of the study, research questions, scope and limitation of the study, definitions of terms, and organization for the subsequent chapters. Chapter II consists of the relevant literature review within the context of Mong parents and school collaboration and/or partnership, home-school

relationships and after-school program for children and families. Chapter III explains the methodology. This chapter will specify the procedures, project development, subjects of the data collection and data analysis. Chapter IV examines the results of the study. It will describe each subject interview and its finding. This chapter also contains the investigation on the

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implications for home and school collaboration environment and the after school program for Mong students and their families.

Finally, chapter V contains a discussion, conclusion, recommendations and suggestions for further study.

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Review of Literature

Introduction

This chapter will review the relevant literature for home-school collaboration, after-school hours program and home-school environment. Both educators and parents have a similar hope for the future of children's education. These hopes rely on how well educators and parents can work together for the children. Mong parents and school personnel have much to learn from each other to become good partners to support the Mong children's education. School personnel and Mong parents play a very important role in school, during after school hours and at home for the educational enrichment for Mong children. An African proverb said, "It takes a whole village to raise a child." This whole child can be served when attention is given to the whole family and school (Barclay and Boone, 1997). In order for Mong students to success in schools, parents and the communities must be become involved in all levels of their education.

Mong Parents and School Connection

The increasing diversity of our population makes it very important for educators to examine their assumptions about minority families, to integrate the rich perspective of different racial and ethnic groups into the school's culture and curriculum, and to be responsive to the complexity of parents' role (Swap, 1993). The Mong people were recently identified as a new culture in the United States for the last two and a half decades. There has not been a whole lot of information and

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education materials about this particular group. According to Faderman (1998), Goldstein (1985), Takaki (1995), Thao (1994 & 1999), Trueba et al. (1990), Vang (1992), Walker (1988), Weinberg (1997) and Yang (1999), the Mong people began their resettlement in the United after 1975. Mong do not have a formal education in their homeland. Thao (1994 & 1999) reported that by 1971 only thirty seven Mong students studied at the university level and 430 Mong students attended primary and secondary in Lao Schools. Due to a lack of formal education in the Mong society, Jordan (1993) found in her study that Mong parents do not know how to become involved, feel uncomfortable and rarely volunteered at school. Trueba et al. (1990) asserted that Mong parents have a vague perception about what actually happens in the American school. Their background experiences about education had little to nothing in common with the United States' public education. However, Mong parents expressed a great desire to be involved in their children's education (Jordan, 1993).

Jordan (1993) further elaborated that school personnel need to be sensitive to the Mong parents and students as well as their culture. School must establish a welcoming environment to allow Mong parents to build confidence in order to receive their participation.

Hmong parents need to have ready access to staff members with whom they can freely communicate. Schools should exert an extra effort to devise ways of bringing Hmong parents in and making them feel comfortable. This may be accomplished through arranging special school meeting to orient Hmong parents to the school's policies and procedures, to familiarize the parents with the school staff, and to respond to the parents' questions and concerns (Jordan, 1993, p. 48).

A dilemma encountered by Mong parents from not speaking and understanding English was a major barrier identified by researchers for Mong families and school communication (Faderman, 1998; Goldstein, 1985; Jordan, 1993; Morrow, 1989 & 1991; O'Reilly, 1998; Trueba et al., 1990; Thao, 1994 & 1999; Vang, 1993; Yang, 1999). Jordan (1993) indicated that Mong parents would like to become more involved in their children's education at school but were not able to do so because of language and literacy issues. Tran (1986) stated, "Language barrier is one of the major reasons for Indochinese parents not to participate in school activities. Many of them do not have adequate English proficiency to understand what goes on in PTA meetings" (p. 65). p. 12

Pang and Cheng's (1998) research indicated that at Linda Vista School in San Diego, California, Mong students are the largest minority group. The staff at Linda Vista committed to make changes on their thinking for Mong parents and parents' outreach school plan. The staff formed an outreach committee who can speak the Mong language and understand their culture. This committee regularly did home visits, planned meetings and workshops for the staff and parents to appreciate the home and school culture. The program was very successful which made the school earned state and national recognitions (Pang and Cheng, 1998).

Goldstein (1985 & 1988) described that the tension of cultural issues has created a major stress to Mong parents for school involvement and Mong students were unable to function in the American educational system. Mong elders had a difficult time balancing between the Mong and American society. Mong children, especially girls, have struggled to understand the meaning between interrelationship in their home and the

dominant culture at school (Goldstein, 1988). In the Mong society, the male gender plays an important role in the family. It is usually from the father. Mong males have the household authority to make decisions for the family (Faderman, 1998 and Thao 1994 & 1999). School needs to be sure that the father is included in the decision making for Mong children. Vang (1992) interviewed nine Mong high school girls to find out why they dropped out of school. All the girls reported that they did not have same opportunity as boys in their family's cultural beliefs. The Mong girls said they were married prior to dropping out of school. Vang (1992) concluded that adolescent Mong girls faced specific barriers and conflict within their own culture and the educational system that impact on their dropping out of school. Traditionally, p. 13

Mong girls' roles were to get married and become housewives. Now, education has changed Mong females' roles (Vang, 1992).

O'Reilly (1998) interviewed five Mong male adults about Mong students' education success rate in North High School at Eau Claire, Wisconsin. All five responded that communication between school and home needs to improve in order to help Mong students become academically successful.

The school can facilitate meetings or programs that help parents develop a better grasp of appropriate teenager behavior, proper expectations, successful parenting techniques, and ways home and school can work together to help Hmong children succeed (O'Reilly, 1998, p. 99).

Yang (1999) did a study on the cause of parent-child conflict within the Mong families in Sacramento, California. He found that Mong parents had difficult time to become involved in their children's

p. 14 school because school personnel were not familiar with the Mong culture. There was little encouragement by school officials for Mong parents to participate in school programs. School often viewed Mong parents as having less interest in their children's education.

Most often, teachers who do not know how to relate with Mong parents tend to ignore them. School officials often say that Mong parents are unwilling to acculturate and assimilate into the American society. When Mong come to see teachers and check on their children's educational progress, instead of finding an interpreter to translate for them, school officials often turn them away because they do not speak English and they cannot understand them. This upsets many Mong parents for the school's ignorance (Yang, 1999, p. 75-76).

An investigation about Vietnamese parents' involvement in school described that a lack of understanding of Vietnamese culture and language by the school personnel caused them to be unable to cope effectively with the Vietnamese parents (Tran, 1992). Morrow (1991) indicated that parents in the Southeast Asian cultures (Cambodian, Laotian, Mong and Vietnamese) are not encouraged or expected to become involved in their children's education. This was an example that expressed the reason why many Mong parents have little involvement in their children's education today. Mong parents choose not to be involved in our public school functions due to the negative experiences and feeling about schools (Morrow, 1991). Yang (1999) stated "Mong parents feel alienated and unwelcome at the school because teachers and school officials treat them like children; this also makes Mong children have less respect for their parents" (p. 81). Morrow (1989 & 1991) concluded

p. 15 that school officials having a commitment to understand Southeast Asian families in a meaningful way can achieve a higher degree in parental involvement.

Home-School Relationships

Numerous studies reported that parents and school personnel working together to create strong school-parent involvement brought greater expectation into children's education and children's academic growth. The California Commission on Teaching Credentialing (1998) points out "Collaboration between schools and homes has repeatedly found to improve students' achievement, attitudes toward learning, and self-esteem" (p. 3). A study supported by Berger (1991 & 1995) on the history of parent-school involvement explained that our children's current and future success in education lies in the parent-teacher collaboration.

The past can provide a guideline for the future, but the time for positive action is now. Schools, community, and parents must join hands in a commitment to their children's future (Berger, 1991, p. 218).

An important way for parents to have commitment in collaborating with school, school personnel need to respect the parents and recognize their values. Parents and teachers are the strongest advocate on behalf of children's education and welfare (Berger, 1995). Involving parents in school take many forms between the home and school. Some parents may have the knowledge of the school and the ability to communicate

with the school but others may not have these factors (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990). Delgado-Gaitan p. 16 (1990) did a study on parental involvement in a Spanish-speaking community and found the parents whom school personnel reach out to in a language they can understand had greater school involvement. In the Mong community, similar issues, such as language barriers, caused Mong parents to feel uncomfortable coming to the school. Therefore, many Mong parents tend to avoid the school setting (Jordan, 1993). The school approached parents to show their support and to help parents understand the roles in school as well as school-related activities at home. Literacy activity played an important connection to Spanish-speaking parents being active in school and at home in their children's education. Delgado-Gaitan (1990) stated:

The parent then told the teacher that she could read to him at home in Spanish and she would help him as much as possible. Pleased at the parent's cooperative response, the teacher assured the parent that she would work with her son to raise his confidence about reading in Spanish before moving to English (p. 160).

Onikama et. al. (1998) and Koki and Lee (1998) conducted their studies on families and parental involvement in education with the Pacific Islanders in Hawaii. They reported that communication played a vital role for parents to become involved in school. Today, schools often disconnect from home and community by embedding numerous barriers. School personnel do not successfully communicate with the people whose language, culture and religion are different from the school.

Family involvement is not closely aligned with the cultures of the Pacific region. For instance, p. 17 when parents do get involved in their children's education, they are not given a culturally appropriate form of recognition because their involvement is not seen as socially attractive or

desirable. In cultures where title holding and social class standing are seen as important, participation in education must become socially desirable to be viewed as important. Presently, attending school functions receives considerable less social value than holding titles and receiving public recognition (Onikama et al., 1998, p. 10).

Ada and Campoy (1998) explained that the obstacles for home-school connections were the unawareness that educators have for parents' everyday life struggle. School needs to understand parents' reality. School personnel put little effort into helping parents to understand the premise of parent involvement. Parents are usually blamed for not taking responsibility for their children's education. These attitudes created in the parents who do not speak English all kind of internal guilt, such as inability to provide contribution to their children's learning. Ada and Campoy (1998) indicated, "In most cases, schools have made little efforts to inform parents of the crucial role that they can play in continuing their children's language development through the use of the home language" (p. 5-6).

California Commission on Teaching Credentialing (1998) stated that schools lacked common understanding about the meaning of family involvement from the old to new images.

p. 18 In the past, the term "parent involvement" implied efforts by educators to make inactive parents more interested in the functioning of the school and in the achievement of their children. Stereotypical images of parent involvement included mothers contributing to bake sales and fathers participating in booster clubs. Newer images and use of the term "family involvement" have recognized the importance of seeking and acknowledging the inclusion of a broader range of family members, caretakers, and students themselves in the "home" side of the relationship (California Commission on Teaching Credentialing, 1998, p. 4).

Ramsey (1998) found one way to change the dynamics of parent involvement in school was to include parents as part of the teaching team. Teachers and parents working together contribute greater knowledge in teaching to engage students' learning. It is also helpful for teachers and parents to understand the information inside and outside school activities which the students are involved in order to help them succeed.

In spite of that, Onikama et al. (1998) indicated that cultural barriers were a major problem faced by families and schools. Currently, school personnel do not have the skills to work with parents whose culture is different from them. The parents who do not have a similar culture as the teachers and school administrators become isolated and distanced from the school. In Hawaii, the Pacific Islanders' culture is a valuable resource to establish communication between the school and parents. If school personnel lack knowledge about the parents and students' culture it often creates uncomfortable interaction between the families and schools (Onikama et al., 1998).

p. 19 The conditions under which parents meet and communicate with teachers may also a cultural barrier. Sometimes the physical aspects of the parent-teacher meeting area (classroom, conference room, school office) may seem contrived and uncomfortable for local parents. A desk between the parties creates a physical barrier that can make relations uneasy. The desk

and chair arrangement, so typical of classrooms on the U. S. Mainland, is not a normal part of some Pacific cultures (Onikama et al., 1998, p. 12).

California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (1998) argued that school involved low-income and culturally families results in a substantial growth on students' education. Parent school involvement is an important factor for student success. Epstein (1986) reported that school and family working together collaboratively are a powerful force to help children succeed at all grade levels through their education. She contended from her research that school must connect with culturally and linguistically diverse families in order to help them understand the school practice. The process to involve parents whose language is not English is not simple. School needs to make appropriate connections to parents by providing a staff member who can welcome, direct, and instruct the parent about the needed activities without creating feeling of discomfort or inadequacy in them (Epstein, 1986).

Involving limited-English-speaking parents in their children's education suggests three requirements from school districts:

awareness of English proficiency among parents of the students; *commitment* to solving the problems of involving all parents, including developing comprehensive programs of all types of parents involvement; and *action* to extend

opportunities for all or most parents to become involved in one or more types of parent involvement, especially in ways that will assist the daily success of their own children in school (Epstein, 1986, p. 14).

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Epstein (1995) recommended that building strong partnership between school and parents is a very important action for parent involvement. School must play a leadership role to construct positive partners with the students' families by creating programs that can bring parents' interest into school. Research by Barber and Patin (1997) also supported the notion that parent involvement improves students' academic performance. School programs with a clear vision for teachers and parents to work comfortably together would provide them a meaningful partnership. Barber and Patin (1997) stated, "Remember that strong parent involvement programs work with parents; they do not just put parents to work" (p. 33).

Furthermore, Sleeter and Grant's (1988 & 1994) research asserted that the barriers for home-school relationships are based on parents' socioeconomic status, race and culture. Uncommon culture and racial backgrounds generate different perceptions between educators and parents. They stated that educators tend to have low expectation for children from parents of color and low income families for not doing well in school.

Teachers also often assume children are not interest in education if they do not display active interest in school tasks, or if parents do not demonstrate support by coming to parent conferences or seeing that homework is done regularly. If they believe the parents are not interested in school, most teachers do not cultivate parent support or involvement (Sleeter and Grant, 1988, p. 1-2).

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Sleeter and Grant (1988) proposed a model for the development of effective parent-school involvement program. It contains four quadrants of a continuum of strategies.

These quadrants display two factors in school involvement: the extent to which parents play an active versus a passive role, and the level of their involvement. In quadrant one, parents are information receivers. In quadrant two parents serve as helpers. In quadrant three, parents participate as regular spectators. In quadrant four, parents participate as collaborative participants (Sleeter and Grant, 1988 (p. 2-3).

It is extremely important for educators to become well trained before they work with parents to help them reinforce positive experiences for parent involvement (Sleeter and Grant, 1988 & 1994).

A study done by Barclay and Boone (1997) found that the most common barriers for school to establish strong home-school partnership is lack of knowledge or skill in working with parents. They suggested that in order to successfully overcome these barriers the school must provide effective staff development on parent involvement. Furthermore, school needs to establish a welcoming school climate for parents. School personnel need to work hard to change the attitudes of the parents who had negative experience with the school. Barclay and Boone (1997) reported, "Speaking to parents in words they can understand and asking for their opinions and ideas as well as their assistance with home learning activities are other ways to begin to chip away at old barriers and build new bridges between the home and school" (p. 17).

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An educational child psychiatrist James Comer (1988) did a study about educating poor minority children. He found that children from a poor and marginal family may not have the adequate preparation for school. School needs to reach out to these families to help with their children's educational development. If schools ignore poor and minority families, the parameters of critical social, psychological, emotional, moral, linguistic and cognitive development continue to become the learning deficits for poor and minority students' future education. The high number of African American children failing in school causes poor black parents to lose hope and confidence for school. Comer (1988) stated, "the dominant Anglo culture, in contrast, placed a high value on independence and personal advancement. The dominant culture devalued the imposed black culture, and many blacks in turn developed a negative self-image" (p. 45). School needs to teach children the skills they need to succeed in the mainstream society (Comer, 1988).

Research by Swap (1993) argued that through the School-Home Transmission, school can build effective parent involvement programs. Schools should implement programs with similar model, "Acknowledge the continuous interchange between home and school and the important role that parents play in enhancing the educational achievement of their children" (p. 30). She asserted this model provides greater connection to parents. It allows parents to understand the roles of parent involvement from the school's goals in curriculum to recreational activities. It is important for school personnel to work sensitively with all racially and culturally diverse parents. The school-parent communication must be done in a mutually

respective way so parents do not have fear about school (Swap, 1993). School needs to have diverse staff to reach out to

linguistically and culturally diverse parents for strong home-school relationships (Ada and Campoy, 1998; O'Reilly, 1998; Sleeter and Grant, 1988 & 1994; Swap, 1993; Yang, 1999).

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However, Henry's (1996) research argued that parent-school collaboration is a gateway to improve our children's future education. She indicated that the ethical perspectives of parent-school involvement can be initiated through efforts of building collaboration for a community school. Schools need to include feminist and cultural views in order to create a family-responsive institution. She concluded, "School is a place where children should be able to participate without the signifiers of family configuration, social class, gender, race, or ethnicity being used as gatekeeping devices to a full education" (p. 129). School personnel must be knowledgeable to work with different parents, communities and business to build relationship with the school.

Teachers must forge new relationships with parents, and begin to see them also as educators. It is critical that administrators and teachers know their school community well, in order to be able to build collaborative relations based on the character and strengths of that community, so that educational accountability is enhanced (Swap, 1993, p. 151).

After-School Program for Mong Children and Families

The author believes that providing educational programs after school for Mong students is the first step to break the students'

educational learning barriers. In Northern California, Kelly (1992) conducted a study on the effectiveness of the Thermalito School District's Mong literacy after-school program to support Mong children's English reading skills. This study revealed that Mong students who participated in the program scored significantly higher on the English reading comprehensive session from the CTBS test than those who did not participate in the program. She concluded that the Mong literacy after-school program provided pre-reading skills for Mong students' beginning readers from primary language to English.

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Researchers Kang et al. (1996) conducted a study on Mong literacy project in Fresno, California. This study confirmed that home literacy and educational skills for Mong parents were very successful. This program enabled Mong parents to understand the roles for involving in their children's education involvement. This study stated that the majority of the Mong parents who participated in the project indicated that they needed to learn the experiences to help their children succeed in the American educational system. They also mentioned the values to preserve their home language and culture (Kang et al., 1996). The results from this Mong literacy project were that Mong parents tended to have higher confidence and motivation to become active in their children's education. Teachers indicated that Mong parents have greater interest in their children's education by attending parent-teacher conferences and participating

in school functions, after gaining educational experiences in the Mong literacy project (Kang et al., 1996).

Shelton (1998) did a newspaper report about my Mong literacy and homework helper after-school program in the California North Coast. She made similar comments stating that Mong literacy was another way

p. 25 to appreciate the Mong culture. She reported that 128 students enrolled in this extracurricular program where local Mong children and adults learn how to read and write in the Mong language.

Many of these young students have never lived in Laos and do not know how to read or write in the Hmong language when they first come to class. They do learn, Thao said (Shelton, 1998, p. B1).

She explained that the after-school homework helper session was to tutor Mong children with their regular school's homework. She quoted the author, "I'm so pleased for all the volunteers who commit themselves to be here to help our children meet their Hmong American dream in this country" (p. B2). Vang (1992) also concluded that without anyone to help Mong students with their homework, the homework itself creates another barrier in Mong children's education.

According to these researchers, after-school programs have major impact on students who lack educational supports from home and in the community. After-school programs provide tutors, role models, mentors, and guidance, and they reinforce positive self-esteem in children's educational learning. The major goals for after-school programs are to help at-risk students from low social class and minority backgrounds (Belle, 1999; Bender, 1994; Bergin et al., 1992; Hutchins, 1997; Morton-Young, 1995; Scales et al, 1997).

Morton-Young (1995) indicates that after-school programs would not be effective without the community's input. The important people who need to be included in organizing strong after-school programs are leaders from the community and non-profit organizations. Church

p. 26 leaders and Community members are also the key people to provide excellent resources with school officials to implement for after school extracurricular activities. He also emphasized that an after-school program must have a vision supported and earned cooperative efforts from the community in order to become more attractive to private and federal funding. It's important to be sure that the program is accessible to all students and parents.

Currently, after-school programs have not yet reached out to all poor families. Belle's (1999) research stated that after-school programs are not affordable for low income children and families. Most after-school programs are for child care and sports recreation. Low income parents have difficulty making arrangement to place their children in this kind of program. Many children from these families are home after school without adult supervision because parents have to work long hours to maintain a middle-class lifestyle or simply to stay out of poverty. Low-socioeconomic class families faced greater financial jeopardy just to place their children into after-school programs. Belle (1999) suggested:

Putting more money in the hands of low-income parents may also allow them to resolve their after-school dilemmas in other ways, by making it possible to afford babysitters, after-school activities, or transportation to and from the activities (p. 160).

Hutchins (1997) did a research on an after-school program developed by a First Baptist Church in Chase City, Virginia. He found that the program benefited many children who needed parental guidance

and encouragement.

p. 27

Many of the children at-risk are found to be in family situations that have both financial and emotional problems that create many hardships for the children and their parents (Hutchins, 1997, p. 3).

Teachers in Chase City School were interviewed about how helpful the after-school program was to their students. They responded that the children who participated in this after-school program showed major progress in their classes. The teachers also provided full support to the program by volunteering and duplicating teaching materials for the church to tutor the children (Hutchins, 1997).

Bergin et al. (1992) reported that educationally disadvantaged children did extremely well in their standardized tests through participating in the Hilton Emergent Literacy Project (HELP) after-school program. In addition, the HELP after-school program put many disadvantaged children back on the right track for education. Many children did better in school by receiving language and reading content taught in the after-school program.

Furthermore, studies by Scales et al. (1997) and Bender (1994) pointed out that after school tutoring programs made excellent connection to the students' families. Family members become more familiar with homework assistance as a result from after-school programs. Everyone expressed strong satisfaction and expressed the need for after-school programs. Scales et al. (1997) concluded: "students and parents were extremely satisfied with the program features, the tutors, and the other adults. Parents indicated that the program

experiences helped their children get along better with them, their siblings, and others, both at home and at school" (p. 179).

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Home-School Environments for Mong Students

The Mong students may have different experiences in terms of home environment and school environment. According to research by Bliatout, et al. (1988), Thao (1994 & 1999), Lopez-Romano (1991), and Trueba et al. (1990), the Mong people came from an oral culture and traditional society. Historically, Mong did not have strong formal education experiences. In the Mong society, Mong families and social structure were built based on patrilineal clans (Thao, 1994 & 1999; Trueba et al., 1990). There were twelve different clans, such as Chang, Her, Moua, Thao, Xiong, Vang, Yang, etc. This clanship represented the Mong's religion ritual practices.

Thao (1999) stated, “The traditional Mong consisted of twelve clans that corresponded to their rituals. Mong rituals are related to Mong religion directly” (p. 12). Bliatout et al. (1988) explained that ceremonial and religious rituals are the typical education for Mong children in the traditional Mong society. The Mong children do not necessarily need a particular permanent study environment to learn these oral skills. In some occasions, Mong children take individual ritual lessons from their elders but the lessons can take place anywhere at anytime. Mostly, Mong children learn by observing their parents and grand parents' daily routine. When children reach their teens, they have gained these basic skills and are ready to move on to a higher levels where they can start their own family and become a household (Bliatout et al., 1988).

- p. 29 Research by Thao (1994 & 1999), Lopez-Romano (1991) and Trueba et al. (1990) explained that since the Mong resettlement in the United States, without a formal education Mong can not get high income jobs. Trueba et al., (1990) and Lopez-Romano (1991) stated that many Mong families do not earn enough money from work for the rent of their tenants. The majority of families live with other Mong families to combine the rent, or are only able to afford a small apartment. This kind of living is critical for Mong children to have a study space in the home. However, the author believe only applied to a few families not for the majority Mong people. There are other semiotics involved to create Mong children struggled in education beside limited space of home and school environment. Trueba et al. (1990) stated:

In one apartment, seven people lived together in a one bedroom apartment - a woman, her husband and his mother, and four children. The use of space was determined according to need (p. 65).

Lopez-Romano (1991) asserted that due to low paying jobs many Mong parents currently face, their only hope is for Mong children to have good education in order to get good jobs. Research supported by Weinberg (1997) contended that most Mong parents do not have an education background but they do have high expectation for their children to attend college as a goal. This faith for their children's education may not turn to be the way the Mong parents' plan. Lee (1996) did a study on the Asian Americans at Academic High School and found many controversial issues hidden within the Asian Americans and the majority groups. She stated, “The stereotyping of Asian Americans as

- p. 30 model minorities sets Asian Americans up as the specific targets of jealousy. Asian Americans are used to blame the victims (i.e., African Americans) for their problems. Thus, whiteness is erased, and people of color are left to fight among themselves” (p. 90). She asserted that school tracked students' academic learning drew a line to physical harm of racism and stereotype.

The sorting and tracking that took place upon walking through the school's front doors reminded students that not all are created equal and not all students were equally welcomed into the AHS community. (p. 90). Tracking at Academic High leads to the resegregation of students and negatively affects interracial relations (Lee, 1996, p. 124).

Similar research done by Pang and Cheng (1998) on the Asian Pacific American students pointed out that inadequate cultural education in school created major conflicts between the home and school culture. It is a demand for teachers to know how to deal with cultural differences in the classroom for Asian students to appreciate all cultures and characteristics. This is also true for the Mong students (Trueba et al., 1990; Yang, 1999). Shade et al. (1997) explained that Mong children need to be in a classroom where they have the opportunity to learn cultural balance between their home, school and community. A culturally responsive classroom will help students to maintain their cultural pride without guilt, anxiety and isolation in their educational environment.

A small number of Mong students are in college because the majority were tracked in high school and were placed into non-college

preparation programs (Goldstein, 1985 & 1988; O'Reilly, 1998; Thao, 1994 & 1999; Vang, 1992; Trueba et al., 1990; Walker, 1988; Weinberg, 1997; Yang, 1999). Goldstein (1985 & 1988) added that English language is a new learning skill for Mong students which creates a number of problems for their academic structure. Ramsey (1998) stated that it is not only children who have these difficulties in school. Culturally and linguistically diverse parents struggle through the same path. Vang (1990) recorded one reason Mong high school girls dropped out of school was because there were no counselors available to guide their education. Both Goldstein's (1985 & 1988) and O'Reilly's (1998) investigations on Mong high school students found that a lack of cultural and family connection in school caused Mong students to struggle in education. Walker's (1988) study indicated that in order for Mong children to succeed in school, teachers, administrators and counselors need to know the Mong people and understand their culture. She stated, "Without this awareness they will not be able to provide equal access to the school curriculum" (p. 49). The same conclusion was made by Goldstein (1995): "This case study of the Hmong has shown that structural and cultural issues must be considered simultaneously to understand the processes of ethnicity for an immigrant minority" (p. 286). p. 31

Sleeter and Grant (1994 & 1998) argued that to turn on learning of students of color, low social class and disability teachers should use appropriate multicultural classroom lessons. It is important for teachers to provide accurate teaching information for students based on the students' racial and background found in the classroom. The materials in the classroom which contained racial stereotypes need to be replaced by more comprehensive information.

Achievement can be enhanced when teachers attempt to make the culture of the school compatible with the child's culture and to work with the child within her or his zone of proximal development (Sleeter and Grant, 1994, p. 57). p. 32

Research by Banks (1993) indicated that poor and minority students did not do well in school because they received little opportunity. It is difficult for students to cope with their learning in the classroom with teachers who have little knowledge or no interest on the students' racial and cultural background.

To create a harmonious environment between the school, home and community, teachers need to know something about their students community and home life. Teachers need to be knowledgeable about parents' educational expectations for their children, languages spoken at home, family and community values and norms, as well as how children are taught in their homes and communities (Banks, 1993, p. 335).

Lewis and Doorlang (1991) studied special education students. They identified that culturally diverse students were often misinterpreted by teachers as special students by the accents of their English language and characteristics of being quiet in class. It is helpful for teachers to become knowledgeable and respectful for different cultural groups in order to teach in a mainstream classroom. They further stated, "Mainstream teacher must be aware of such differences in order to understand the behavior of students from diverse cultures" (p. 411). Chavez and O'Donnell (1998) agree that if teachers do not become sensitive to the student's culture and linguistic differences, then

p. 33 students will become disconnected from the instruction received in the classroom. Students cannot relate their experiences to the subject because teachers fail to incorporate students' culture into the lessons. When students cannot make sense of the content taught in the classroom, teachers tend to refer them to Special Education (Chavez and O'Donnell, 1998). This assumption commonly happens to Mong students, who are labeled as having learning disabilities by school personnel (Trueba et. al., 1990).

Cummin's (1986) theory described that minority students often have learning disabilities and school failure because they were disempowered by the school. School that empowers minority students will provide them the ability, confidence and motivation to succeed in education. He concluded that educators and policy makers, "must redefine their roles within the classroom, the community, and the broader society so that these role definitions result in interactions that empower rather than disable students" (p. 33). A similar argument was made by Walker (1988), and Bliatout et al. (1988) in that if schools implement such programs to enhance Mong students' cognitive development skills, encourage them to maintain their language and culture, then they would have strong reinforcement for educational learning.

Closing

It is important to remember that Mong children cannot achieve through school alone. They need all the supports they can get from school personnel and parents. School and Mong parents must work

p. 34 together to provide the necessary educational tools for Mong children to achieve academically and individually. School personnel and parents need to ensure a safe and caring attractive environment in partnership with our diverse school community. The commitment to establish an environment which allows opportunities for all teachers, parents and children to have access to multicultural education will allow students to grow up their full potential. Mong children need to be encourage, have comforts and values as lifelong learners in school.

Methodology and Research Design

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This chapter describes the method used to conduct this study. The author spent five years in the Mong community as a community activist. He was employed for four years in California North Coast City School District based at Westside Elementary School as a teacher; and a volunteer coordinator for the Mong Literacy and Homework Helper after-school program. In addition, he also was a volunteer director in the Mong Community Non-Profit Organization for five years. As a result, tremendous primary resources were collected during of 1993 to 1998.

The project is based on ethnographic interviews with nine teachers, nine Mong students and nine Mong parents, conducted in 1999. In addition, the author also reflected on data collected from all the years he had taught in the school district and had lived in the Mong community. These data included artifacts and informal observations from 1993-1998 in the Mong community and school district; and information about the Mong Literacy and Homework Helper after-school program in the California North Coast. The interviews were typed recorded and transcribed. Then, the transcription, artifacts and data collection were meshed together to triangulate for the findings.

Data Collection

There were three levels of Mong literacy classes taught in the after-school program at Westside Elementary School. It had a beginning,

intermediate and advanced classes. The students participated in the Mong literacy classes were tested before they were placed in the appropriate classes (See Appendix C). A report card was issued twice during the year to parents on the progress of the students. The report cards were sent home in February and June. They were to keep records of the students' academic progress in the Mong Literacy classes.

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In the Homework Helper session, a letter was sent by the program coordinator to the students' parents and teachers to ask for their personal responses about the students' academic improvement throughout the school year (See Appendix D). This letter was to inform parents and teachers about student's academic progress and to request feedback they might have about the program.

In addition, at the end of each school year, a survey was sent to the students and parents about the program (See Appendix E). Also, an annual student's work display and an award ceremony were held to honor the students' achievement in the program in the last day of school. Parents, teachers, and administrators were invited (See Appendix F).

In 1999, the author interviewed nine teachers, nine Mong students and nine Mong parents with five similar open-ended questions (See Appendix A). The parents' interviews were done in Mong; the students' done in both Mong and English for their comfort level of language skills, and the teachers' in English. Each interview was lasted for one hour.

The subjects' participation in this process of interviews was voluntary. During the course of this investigation, the policies and procedures of the California State University Monterey Bay Institutional Review Board (IRB) were strictly adhered to because human subjects were

p. 37 involved in the study. Letters, phone and written consent were made before the actual interviews were conducted (See Appendix B).

Subjects

Nine teachers in Westside Elementary School were interviewed, including nine students and nine parents whose children currently attend or had previously enrolled in Westside Elementary School. Of the nine students who participated in this interview, four currently attend Westside Elementary School. The other five were former students of Westside Elementary School. These students also attended the Mong Literacy and Homework Helper after-school program. Westside Elementary School is a fictitious name the author used for the school.

Data Analysis

The interview transcripts have been analyzed and interpreted with respect to each of the research questions. The data collected in the Mong community and school from 1993-1998 were also evaluated. The Mong Literacy and Homework Helper after school parent-student's survey responses were tabulated. Mong Literacy's report cards, placement tests and portfolio works were carefully studied. Parents and teachers' personal responses and/or discussion on the students' regular school year academic progress were analyzed. The interviews done in Mong with the Mong parents and students were carefully translated into English. The author is a Mong native speaker. He did all the translation for the Mong interviews.

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Results

Introduction

This chapter describes the results of the study. It explains the interviewees' responses to the questions posed by the author. In this research, the author describes the major themes found from all the participants through the interviews. It also reports the data interpretation collected from 1993-1998.

Interview Questions and Answers

What kind of environment would support Mong students' education success?

All twenty-seven people from the interviews responded that a strong supportive environment which is non-threatening and low stress. Allowing for new ideas and welcoming every family member would help Mong students to have success in education. This environment needs to have a comfortable setting and not isolate the Mong students. The environment must allow

Mong students to explore without pressure for their academic development. A teacher explained:

Mong students need to be in a real comfortable level that has no high stress. We as teachers need to make sure they are not in the environment where we talking down to them and put pressure on them. We need to trust them. Have them feel comfortable in the school with their own exploration. They need a friendly environment, one that is not

threaten and be able to answer their concerns (Smith, Personal Interview, 1 June 1999).

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Fourteen out of twenty-seven subject participants indicated that a non-violent environment would help Mong students to have focus and do well in school. They expressed internal feeling that they are not being safe in the environment which now they live and go to school. Her described, "We need a safe place where there is not any gang members so no one would get hurt. We need a place that has no violence around for us to study" (Personal Interview, 4 June 1999).

Six students explained that the kind of environment today no longer supports their education. Parents and teachers do not provide a relevant environment which builds their confidence and reassurance for education. Teachers, administrators and parents often tolerated them as having gang social behavior risk. They have no expectation for their education instead viewed them as a juvenile violent predators.

Our parents, teachers and administrators think we were in Gang. Even we don't do gang's things, they still said the way we dressed. We are gangsters. No Mong kids want to dress the old fashion way. We want to be like other non-Mong kids too. They continue to put us down at home and in school by the way how we look. They don't said those things to other non-Mong kids who dressed like us in school. I think they need to understand us little more before they said we all were gangsters. You know, sometime we need to hang together in school with other Mong kids during lunch just in case other kids don't like Mong kids jump on us (Thao, Personal Interview, 30 May 1999).

All nine Mong students stated that a supportive environment where parents and teachers give them an opportunity, love and lots of encouragement would help them do well in school.

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We need to be in an environment where our parents give us their love and encouragement too. Mong students are not like other students from other parents. In our culture, our parents don't say things like we love you or you done a excellent job and I congratulated you for it. You do things for yourself and if you don't succeed then that is it. Some teacher really care about us, but mostly other teachers they don't care about us. You know, because we different and we have no confident in the these teachers' classrooms at all (Vang, Personal Interview, 2 June 1999).

Nine Mong parents clearly indicated an environment that allows children and parents to establish a respectful relationship will help Mong students become successful in school. All the parents agreed that Mong children do not do well in school because they were given too

many rights by the law in this country. The Child Protective Services (CPS) agency is there to protect the rights of children, so they display certain bizarre behaviors in an environment without having respect to their parents, teachers and other adults.

There have been lots of cases involved Mong family that CPS came and took all the children away because they don't understand our culture and how we practice it. Most Mong parents gave up because the law believe in our children and gave too much power for them. They helped our children to challenge us. We cannot discipline our children to the

p. 41 point where they can afraid us. Our role as parents had approach to a dead end road. The way I see the law in this country operates do not get me much choices to raise my children. I cannot help my children learn in school without discipline them. They never seem to understand us. We love our children more than anything else. We only disciplined our children to prevent from doing bad things. We only discipline our children for their well being, not to kill or harm them. Police and CPS would came to us and told us that what we did was wrong. Right now, we felt that we have no right to raise children in the way we used to. Our children can lie to police for us to get arrested. Our children were no longer have respect to us as their parents and other adults. Police and CPS shouldn't belief our children so much to create problems for the parents. This way we can build our trust (Thao, Personal Interview, 30 May 1999).

Nine teachers explained that an environment where Mong students have access to support in their education both in Mong and in English would be a very important place to help Mong children do well in school. "Certainly, an environment that supports their first language as well as their second language. An environment that have low stress and allow the Mong students to progress in their pace and given them lots of supports in both languages," said Smith (Personal Interview, 1 June 1999).

What kind of collaboration do Mong parents, teachers, and administrators need to engage in, to help Mong students to succeed in their education?

Twenty-seven participants in the interviews reported that establishing a well balanced relationship where Mong parents, teachers

p. 42 and administrators can understand their communication about the educational quality of Mong students, maintain trust, exchange resources and share ideas are excellent partnerships. Nine Mong students responded that their parents, teachers and administrators need to work together to create a school where they can understand Mong children's struggle. A student explained:

I think my parents don't understand how American people work and their school system. My parents don't come to my conference. They don't even know who are my teachers. My teachers also don't even know who are my parents. When my parents come to school, they don't speak English so they rather stay home. My teachers does not bother to try reach out to my parents and always depends on a Mong translator who is not always available. I am not sure that they

know what is going in my life because they don't work together to plan a good future for me (Her, Personal Interview, 4 June 1999).

Six Mong students also expressed confusion about their own educational goal and shared that adults usually perceive negative reaction to them. Parents, teachers and administrators do not provide students with positive guidance and reinforcement. These Mong students felt they were to blame as youth at-risk. They described that adults thought youth fights in the school or in the community were all gang related. They do not take time to understand the problem. Most fights were about racial issues and the adults neglected the problem. They reported as gang fight. When talking about stress, five students wanted to quit school. A student said, "Parents, teachers and administrators need to appreciate more on the things children do at

home and in school. They do not want to take time to understand us. Once you get into trouble, that's it. You either get kicked out of school or label as gang" (Chang, Personal Interview, 3 June 1999). p. 43

Nine teachers explained that if Mong parents, teachers and administrators work together without any distraction and/or intermediation, this would engage everyone's interest to support Mong students' education. They said often providing a comfortable level of parent-teacher conferences for Mong parents would give them encouragement, role model and technical tool to support Mong children in school. Two teachers described the possible options for Mong parents and school personnel to work collaboratively.

If teachers, administrators and parents can get together to talk about their different expectation, the school expectation, the home expectation and also talk their resources. What in there home, the family feel comfortable doing or do the family that there are certain types of resources can help their children. They can tell the school that and school can understand the kind of things parents want (Pseudonym Johnson, Personal Interview, 1 June 1999).

I think in every way we can open things up to make connection to the Mong parents are very important. It makes them feel comfortable coming to our school and sharing something they know (Pseudonym, Powell, Personal, Interview, 4 June 1999).

Seven parents stated that teachers know the most and they needed to approach Mong parents in terms of collaboration. In order for teachers, administrators and Mong parents to establish a good

partnership, it must be done in a way that Mong parents can understand the language. School personnel should act first to connect with parents. This was the appropriate way for home-school connection. School personnel know what needs to be done in school. A parent explained: p. 44

I give my highest respect for my children's teachers and I count on them to teach my children to be success in school. When I have questions, I don't want to ask them because I assumed they know everything. I learn from the Lao school system that teachers were superior and I still think the American school system would do the same. I don't want to disturb the teachers. I am shy and even afraid of the teachers because they know more than I do. If they don't come to me, I

assumed they don't need my idea so I don't go to them either. When they realized that I don't speak English or know anything about U.S. school. They never ask me anything. It seems like I was put down anytime I try to talk to them. When they put me down, they also put my children down and have low expectation for my children's education, especially in the Junior High and High School (Her, Personal Interview, 29 May 1999).

All nine Mong parents explained that teachers, administrators and parents need to have a proactive collaboration. They expressed concern that mostly teachers and administrators did not come forward to the Mong parents until after their children already established serious problems in school. The earlier they work together the better to prevent their children from school failure. "They only called me to go the school when my kids were in trouble. I did not remember any invitation from the school that my children were outstanding students and I need to

p. 45 help the teachers celebrate their recognition," said Vang (Personal Interview, 4 June 1999).

These nine Mong parents stated that working with teachers and administrators created a lot of tension and confusion. The way students and parents were referred by school personnel to other specialty personnel usually generated greater frustration for Mong parents. It made them feel unsure about who really cared and wanted to work with them. Mong parents preferred to have a long term relationship with the teachers and administrators who they work with. A parent stated:

Sometime we went to talk to the teachers or principal but they told us we need to see the school counselor. Who is the school counselor anyway? You have to set up a special appointment to see this person. We though the teachers and principal suppose to help us when our children have a problem in school. You actually have to go through at least two different people before you can get to see the person that suppose to help you. Usually, we don't go school because we never know who really our main supporter (Yang, Personal Interview, 31 May 1999).

What kind of academic activities would you like to see happen to the Mong students in school and at home?

All nine teachers reported that reading was important for Mong students to continue to practice at home and in school. The more they read, the more they will increase their English language skills. Reading will consciously help them with their English in school. Reading is a tool to build their writing, speaking and listening in English. Also, Mong

p. 46 students should participate in recreational and extracurricular activities to connect them into education. Mong parents having lots of interaction with their children related to school activities would help them to have more knowledge about education. Two teachers said:

Mostly reading, I think it is really important. They need to practice English reading. Also, listen to Native English speaker read to them so they can get the language and the tense which is very difficult. When the Mong kids start having the tense and verb then they can get it right. Have a

native English speaker read for them so they can get the pronounce right. Just practice and practice the reading (Willis, Personal Interview, 1 June 1999).

Reading, have the Mong students read to their parents in English and the parents can listen. The children and parents can talk about the book in Mong after the child read so parents can participate in the Home Reading (Smith, Personal Interview, 1 June 1999).

These nine teachers also expressed that it was important to have a bilingual supporter for the Mong students at school. Furthermore, letting the Mong students participate in cooperative learning activities in all the curriculum that is dictated by the school district and allow them to bring their home culture to enrich their learning in the classroom is a treasure.

Nine Mong students indicated that having a Mong language and culture class in school would help them learn their Mong things and be able to have greater communication with their parents or elders. At home, they would like to see their parents respond more to their

education and teach them Mong language. A student responded:

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The school should have a Mong class and a Mong teacher there teaching us Mong. For instance, I speak English often and I don't get the Mong stuff so I think in school to learn Mong and English so that Mong teenager and little kids can get both of the languages. At home, our parents need to sit down with us and teach us Mong like the American parents do for their kids in English (Hang, Personal Interview, 3 June 1999).

Four students wanted to see school provide an academic program that would help Mong students to go into college because often Mong students were tracked into the low track in high school and they thought they could not make it. Then, they forgot about school and no longer had hope for college.

Nine Mong parents indicated that Mong children should learn about all the different cultures in school and be able to identify their own identity as well. They explained that Mong children needed to be given equal access for the educational quality that would fulfill their dream. School must provide academic activities to maximize Mong students' ability in learning on how to take responsibilities and understand the world views of being Mong and being Americans. A Mong parent expressed his concern about what his children had learned in school and that the Mong's culture was missing in school.

I have a teenage boy in high school and every night he told me he does not have homework. I do not see him carry books from school at all. I went to check in the school office and a lady told me that he enrolled in

six classes. Those classes are required for high school graduation. She never told me what they were doing in those classes. When I asked my son, he said they do school things but I still am not sure because sometime I pick him up after school, I see the White students carry a very heavy backpack. I believe it must be books or something for them to study at home. You know, sometime I see American students carry a big case like music instruments. I do not see Mong

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children have these kinds of things. Also, I like to see the Mong language and culture activities being offer in school as part of the Mong children's academics. I am not worried about Mong children having a problem to learn English because they speak English everyday in school and at home. I am concerned that they will have trouble learning Mong. They no longer like to learn Mong and refused to speak Mong to us. If there is Mong a class require by the school for Mong students to take I think they will have a little respect to us as parents (Thao, Personal Interview, 30 May 1999).

At home, all Mong parents recognized they needed to consider taking their children to participate in more recreational activities such as fishing, camping, picnicking and traveling, etc. They agreed that their children should maintain their primary language. They said that their children had difficulty speaking Mong and appreciating their Mong customs. Five of the parents felt that Mong parents needed to spend more time with their children and establish a closer relationship with them. These five parents described that when their children were happy in the family, so were they in their education.

p. 49 **What are some of the challenges of communication between Mong parents and school?**

Eighteen of the twenty-seven people responded that language was a major issue to create difficulty for Mong parents and school personnel in terms of communication. Teachers and Mong parents indicated that during a meeting it was very complicated to understand the information between one another. Even though they have lots of things which they wanted to discuss but little information could be understood and it was a very frustrating process. A teacher explained that a Mong interpreter would make their communication so much easier to understand.

These interpreters must be available all the time. This is a “absolute must” especially at a school like (Pseudonym Westside Elementary). If an interpreter is here all the time and parents come up to us we know right a way whether is a health issue or what kind of problems they want us to help them. An interpreter is the key person that school must have in place. If we don't have that we were just all deaf because we turn the parents off when they were at our school. But, I think in Westside, parents begin to understand more what school is about and know the resources. When parents really understand then they don't feel intimidated when entering the school. Years ago it was hard, especially for the Mong parents. It takes a long process of adjustment. Now, they become visible in the school, come in the school to pick up their kids instead waiting outside of the school. Ten years ago, they used to be out there by the street, but now they are in the hallway by the classroom door waiting and greeting with us. I think a lot of us begin to know how to communicate with them (Fabian, Personal Interview, 2 June 1999).

p. 50 **Seventeen people reported that culture acceptance, recognition and appreciation were the problems like a brick wall that blocked the line of communication. These seventeen participants expressed that an uncommon culture between the Mong and the school is the biggest stubborn factor. Johnson (fictitious) said, “The challenge to get understanding between**

two cultures, both culture need to be knowledge for each other” (Personal Interview, 4 June 1999).

Fourteen people stated that a lack of literacy and education background knowledge caused Mong parents and school personnel not to understand the life situation in school and at home. They replied that this dilemma continued to generate communication challenges in both groups. A Mong parent described:

Right now the most challenges for own Mong parents and school communication is the language and literacy. The Mong parents come from a society that don't require literate skill to a society which highly recognize literate skill. This adjustment make it so difficult for us and the school to communicate (Xiong, Personal Interview, 4 June 1999).

All twenty-seven reported having Mong translators who were well trained, well received and well respected by the Mong parents, teachers, administrators and students would be able to bridge the gap in communication. Morton stated, “School needs to have a translator who can think at the same level as teachers, even we don't speak a common language, this person can communicate for both of us without creating frustration between us” (Personal Interview, 4 June 1999).

Are after-school or weekend programs, such as homework tutoring, and culture and language workshops, important for Mong students and parents?

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Twenty-seven people in this study reported that after-school and weekend programs are absolutely necessary for Mong students and parents. They stated that an after-school program to provide homework help for Mong students and parents was extremely important. Nineteen indicated that a program to offer after school workshops in Mong culture would benefit Mong parents by increasing their confidence to participate in their children's education, for teachers to gain knowledge about the Mong people and students' access to Mong culture. Fifteen of the subject-participants agreed a program to teach Mong language and culture for Mong students was a substantial way to preserve the Mong heritage and encourage Mong children to keep close contact with their parents. Eleven explained that the homework help place would model a strategy for Mong parents and students to know how to support for homework at home. Twenty-five participants expressed that after-school and weekend programs were important to preventing children from getting involved in gang activities. A parent described:

I like it when you [the author] had the school open for us to come in to teach our language, culture and help children with their homework. I love to visit the school because it gives me an opportunity to see the things my children's learn and see the real school classrooms. During a school day when I come to the school, I know my way around and I was less nervous. Even though, if someone questions me when I was in the school, I know that you [the author] always in the school. I know which room you [the author] teach and I ask them to talk to you. Most

teachers always saw me after school and they recognize who I am. I never thought I am a stranger to the school. I tell you [the author], have the school open for Mong parents really

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make us feel comfortable around the school. When I have questions or I need it help right a way, school is the only place. I just come right up and get help. This is the fastest way. If I go to another place, I had to have an appointment (Yang, Personal Interview, 31 May 1999).

Several teachers expressed the value and benefit of an after-school program that would be able to earn their partnerships between the Mong parents and school.

The homework helper center not just only gives benefit to the Mong students and parents but it also give to us too as an exchange or reciprocal relationship. I am sure the Mong parents like the program a lot because I see them help their children every time I walk into the classroom and the school hallway after school. People have a lot to give if they just knew when they can do it. I think it is important for people to contribute as well as receive. Also, have them take ownership and be part of it (Pseudonym Powell, Personal Interview, 4 June 1999).

I think an after-school program is very important. The children learn their own language is important for them in the future and for academic reasons. When you [the author] did your homework helper program, I saw a lot of parents and growth in the students' academics. Even parents coming and reading in the program. The program helped children's homework which is too hard for them to do it along and parents' can't help. Students would have a sense of direction in doing homework. I think it teaches them a sense of responsibilities because

you [the author] training them how to do homework so as they grow older they know how to do their own homework. They had the habit of doing homework. The language workshop part give them the bilingual skills (Smith, Personal Interview, 1 June 1999).

I think after-school program is an absolutely necessary. Just going to school isn't going to cut the mustard, they got to be able to have tutoring and the culture and language workshop. It must take place in order for that language to be a common language. Just don't kill the culture and language (Morton, Personal Interview, 4 June 1999).

A Mong student described how much benefit the after-school homework helper program for Mong students had impact her and what she learned from the Mong literacy program.

I think it is very important because mostly in the Mong society, Mong kids don't understand their homework. They just write down anything and say okay I finish my homework. They don't really get what they were doing. They just write any things down to get it over with and when their parents said, "Did you do your homework?" They answered, "Yeah" but the parents don't check it to see if they really done it. The homework helper program help me to understand how to do my homework and I get my homework done it right because someone who knows really check through what I was doing. The Mong literacy really help me to understand my language and culture. This make me feel more comfortable when the old people talk to me. Especially, my aunts, uncles and my parents' friends (Her, Personal Interview, 4 June 1999).

A parent expressed that a Mong literacy after-school program was an opportunity for Mong children to preserve their culture. The homework helper released the burden of the Mong parents by not knowing how to help their children with school work.

When my English teacher in the Mong refugee camp in Thailand encouraged me that if I come to America I must make sure my children don't lose my culture and language because when Mong

children no longer have these things then they no longer have an identity. Now, I think about it and it makes lots of sense to me. The Mong children do not learn anything in the school about Mong. Your [the author] Mong literacy is a way for our children to preserve our culture and remember our language. The homework tutor is really important because it makes my life easier. I don't know how to help my children in their homework. I know that someone is available to support me help my children. I really appreciate for your [the author] love and care about us and our children. I felt sad because you [the author] had to go away to study and we don't have anyone like you [the author] around here that can do that anymore (Vang, Personal Interview, 1 June 1999).

Data Collection From 1993-1998

A survey on the Mong literacy and homework helper after-school program was sent home to students and parents at the end of each school year. There were five questions in the survey. In each year, the survey was used as an evaluation for the program and preparation for the following year. Every year, the results from the survey provided positive feedback information to the program. In 1997-98 school year, 142 survey

forms were sent home and 136 forms have been returned. The rate of response was ninety-six percent. The following are a list of questions in the survey form. p. 55

1. *Why do you or your child attend this after-school program?* All 136 return surveys reported that they needed help with homework and wanted to learn the Mong reading, writing, language and culture.
2. *Do you think the program is helpful to you or you child?* Ninety-five percent responded positively and five percent negatively.
3. *Would you or your child like to continue coming to the program next year?* 100% stated positively.
4. *Do you or your child like the program to provide the same services as this year for next year?* Ninety-eight percent responded positively and two percent negatively. These two percent responded that they would like to see the Mong traditional ritual taught in the program as well.
5. *Does your child or you have any comments?* Twenty percent responded positively. "I like the program very much." Eighty percent responded with no comments.

A placement assessment was given to students when they registered for the Mong literacy class. In the Mong literacy program, there were three levels taught: Beginning, Intermediate and Advanced. When the Mong literacy program began in 1993-1994, there were forty-six

students enrolled and no students knew how to read and write in Mong. They were all placed in the beginning level. In the second year, seventy-two students registered for the program and twenty-eight students were placed in the intermediate session, and forty-four students in the beginning level. The enrollment increased to ninety students in the third year. Forty-two students were placed in the intermediate and forty-eight in the beginning level. In the fourth year, there were 114 students enrolled in the program. Twenty-eight were placed in the p. 56

advanced level, forty in the intermediate and forty-six in the beginning. In the fifth year, there were 142 students assessed for the 1997-1998 school year. Fifty-four students were placed in the beginning level, forty-five in the intermediate session and forty-three in the advanced course.

During the year, students would be either promoted to move forward or retained in the appropriate level based on their Mong academic growth and recommendations by their teachers. An average of fourteen students either never returned or left the program in the mid year because they felt they had developed sufficient competence in the Mong reading and writing. However, they continued to drop in for tutoring in the homework helper session. In June 1998, there were fifty-one students in the beginning level, fifty-three in the intermediate session and thirty-eight in the advanced course.

The students' report cards and portfolios combined showed considerable academic growth in the Mong language throughout the school year. The students with a perfect attendance constituted seventy percent. Twenty-five of the seventy percent were doing very well in the program. A few students in this twenty-five percent were those who started the program at the beginning level. As they progressed through

p. 57 the year they were promoted to either the intermediate or advanced level. Students who needed improvement were those who often absent or tardy. The Mong literacy instructions and culture workshops were mainly conducted in the form of lecturing, story telling and memorizing to recite what was being taught in class. When student missed a class, it is difficult for them to catch up. In 1997-98, a combined result of the students that left the program and in the advanced level together made a total of one hundred eight students who were fluent in the areas of Mong reading and writing.

In the homework helper session, a letter was sent home with the students after they officially enrolled in the program to ask their parents and their teachers to keep track on their homework improvement throughout the school year. In addition, 142 letters were sent home and only fifty seven of the students' teachers and parents returned their comments to let the homework helper coordinator know how effective the program was. The author was concerned about the remaining eighty-five students who did not return the comments. Since the after-school program began, the comments made by teachers or parents about the homework helper program received excellent compliments and stated that the program had tremendous impact for Mong students. Mong students successfully completed all their homework and did it correctly. Two teachers described their reflection of how successful the program had been:

This after-school provide support for Mong students to have pride of who they are and receive additional English tutoring. We all love to learn about the sense of our ancestor, our past and our culture. This

p. 58 also give them the opportunity to learn their culture and so they can share their culture. Since you [the author] left our school, we haven't have any Mong dancer come to the school and no one help our Mong students with their school work. The literacy and homework tutoring are important because it gave us space at school where we can learn from each other. I think it is wonderful of what you [the author] have done in our school. I think at Westside, one of the joy has been to

work with Mong parents, Mong family and Mong students (Intersimone, Personal Interview, 2 June 1999).

I love the Mong literacy here at our school run by you [the author] because our Mong students are becoming more literate in their own language while at the same time it becomes knowledgeable in the English language. This program has a real asset and it helps teachers, students and family as well as the community (Tollefson, Personal Interview, 3 June 1999).

There was an average of twelve to fourteen volunteer tutors per evening to assist Mong students with their homework. These volunteers were from a local Senior Resources Volunteer Center, High School, California State University, the community college and the community.

In addition, the author reviewed data compiled from Westside Elementary Schoolwide plan for parents' involvement and education. The goal stated, "parents and school staff will become partners in the education of the child" (Westside Schoolwide Plan, 1996-2000). The school's outcome indicators for this goal were sign-in log, parent/student conferences log, sign-in sheets for parent education events and reading logs. The sources used to assess this information are through Healthy Start records, Parents Conferences, Parent

Involvement Survey and Sign-in Logs. The data revealed that, at Westside Elementary school, ninety-nine percent of the time Mong parents came to all the parent-teacher conferences. Only one percent of the parents missed their conference appointment because it was difficult for all the teachers to rearrange one conference schedule with them. During a parent-teacher conference time, a priority schedule was given to the Mong parents. All the teachers were scheduled back to back in a classroom where a bilingual translator was available for the Mong parents and the teachers (normally this translator was the author).

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According to the school's record, a small number of Mong parents participated in the school events if there was no Mong translator available and no personal invitation to the Mong parents from the school. An average of fifty percent of the Mong parents came to Westside Elementary to request other social services, such as as requests for doctor appointment from the school nurse. They came to school activities, such as potluck, garden project, special request, bilingual parents meeting and Mong culture performance.

Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

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Discussion

This study provided tremendous insight about the struggle between school personnel, Mong parents and Mong students in education involvement. The important knowledge contributed by interview participants and researchers clearly explains that schools need to understand Mong families' basic need for education and cultural tradition in order to bridge the gaps for parent-school collaboration. The California Commission on Teaching Credentialing (1998) stated that the parents who are familiar with the American educational system can navigate themselves by advocating effectively on behalf of their children's education. Families who do not understand

the American school system or have educational background need educators' guidance. In this way unschool parents can learn from school the value of their children's education. The norm in public school should be honesty and humanistic accepting of Mong's culture as part of a multicultural curriculum for Mong students. Multicultural education approaches bring equal opportunity and equity in education for students from a variety of cultural groups, such as race, sex, class and disability (Sleeter and Grant, 1994; Banks, 1993).

The author's experience is that lack of familiarity with the Mong people and their culture makes contact with Mong parents very difficult. The majority of Mong parents were struggling through a broken promise made by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) during their services in the

p. 61 U.S Secret Army in Laos. The Secret War in Laos caused Mong parents to distrust someone from the outside. Thao (1999) stated, "This war was devastating to the Mong. It was estimated that 40,000 people were killed or died due to the result of the war. Many innocent Mong children as young as fourteen were drafted to the military to bear arms" (p. 44). During my interviews, a Mong parent shared his frustration living in the United States and the hospitality Mong provided to Americans in Laos:

When Americans came to our village, we loved them. We provided them with good hospitality. We fed them with good food. We killed pigs and chickens for them to eat. We showed them around and we let them sleep in our house like a family member. Now, we live in their country. The Americans have no respect for us. They don't even care about who we are. They still call us names and tell us to go back to where we belong. When we did some mistake, they told us that we broke the law and we have to go to jail. We don't know the law. How would we break such a law in this country? They came to our country to recruit us to the war. Many of our people died and our lives were disrupted. We could not do or say anything to them. They need to help us learn their law instead put us in jail and let us figure it out by ourselves. I think the only way they do this because they want the police to have more work to do. They need to provide a good lawyer to protect us like we protected them in Laos from the communist (Thao, Personal Interview, 30 May 1999).

A way for educators to welcome Mong parents is to establish a school policy that is flexible to Mong parents. This policy must allow Mong parents to enter the school ground without fear and bring their

p. 62 traditional perspective to address in the school. Koki and Lee (1998) reported that today public schools do not inherit parents' traditional culture and many parents view themselves as outsiders rather than insiders in schools. Henry's (1996) research argued, "An open policy is needed and a demonstrated commitment to not only listen to all perspectives on an issue, but to seek to make changes in new directions-always bearing in mind what is in the student's best interests" (p. 151). Onikama, Koki and Hammond (1998) made a similar argument:

The highest level of involvement and empowerment is achieved when parents are able to set policies and influence decision making at their schools. The likelihood that parents will

participate at this level increase when they have acquired the knowledge, confidence, and sense of belonging required for effective involvement (p. 15).

A school's Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) itself would not bring Mong parents to collaborate and make decisions for the school. Mong parents personally like to work directly with teachers not with other parents to associate with their children's education. Morrow (1989) reported, "Southeast Asians' attitudes toward parental involvement in the schools is radically different from that of Americans" (p. 293). Also, Mong parents do not always come to a school where they have to set up an appointment in order to meet a staff. They prefer a school that always leaves its door open for Mong parents to come in anytime they have questions or need help, and that has a Mong interpreter on duty.

Mong translators must be well trained to work with Mong parents, students and teachers in order to earn respect from school personnel,

students and parents. It is important for Mong translators to know the ethical and moral issues in school for them to bridge the communication gaps between Mong parents, students and teachers. They must learn to become effective advocate for Mong parents and Mong students. Mong translators' schedule needs to be flexible to parents and allow them to feel comfortable speaking to them. Sometimes Mong translators were not available or not able to meet for a longer time as requested by Mong parents. When Mong parents need additional help in school, Mong interpreters' schedules are all planned by school personnel and they could not be there for them. Trueba et al. (1990) stated that school pays for the interpreters and school personnel control the timing and the content of school-home communication. p. 63

The author completed his teaching credential and undergraduate college education in the field of teacher education. His native language is Mong and he is fluent in three languages: Mong, Lao and English. He learned that being a translator is not an easy task. It is not that you are bilingual and you can be an effective interpreter. An interpreter must know what is right and what is wrong in the message which needs to be translated for both parties. The most important role for a translator is to build trust with the Mong parents and let them know that he/she is there to help them. An effective Mong interpreter must maintain a good conversation between the Mong parents and teachers without having one getting angry with another or turning them off because the translation gets lost.

Furthermore, effective Mong translators would engage Mong parents more in a regular school meetings, help Mong parents understand the function of the whole school and support Mong children

to do well in school. Yang (1999) reported, "Mong parents feel that schools and the school system do not want to spend \$20,000 or more a year to hire a full time Mong community liaison or a Mong parent-advisor to help Mong students and bridge the gap between Mong parents and the schools" (p. 81). This caused Mong parents to be unclear about the school and they continue to have strange feeling when coming into their children's school. Smith expressed, "Mong parents would be willing to collaborate with the school once the school function were p. 64

explained to them in their language and they know exactly what the teachers were expecting, then they will feel comfortable to partner with the teachers” (Personal Interview, 1 June 1999). Willis stated, “The parents do not understand what we want the kids to do. When they're getting a story from the kids may not be true so I think we need someone who can speak the language” (Personal Interview, 2 June 1999).

The Mong parents who do not speak English may feel uncomfortable coming to a school that required them to get permission from the school office without an interpreter in school. Trueba et al., (1990) stated that Mong parents faced with language problem in school and school personnel recorded they do not want to react to their children's education. School personnel often do not take time to appreciate the cultural conflict in the Mong family and the dilemmas they confront in their daily education. Henry (1996) argued that school should not credit only the parents who can easily have access to school. Educators need to try for all parents to understand the process of home-school collaboration. Parents' values, cultural practices, knowledge and skills must become more included in the school.

In addition to having a clear communication and understanding

p. 65 the relationship between school personnel, Mong parents and students, after-school programs have a significant effect for Mong children in education. When the author first began teaching in the California North Coast School District, the author kept thinking and questioning himself why the district has programs, such as English as a Second Language, Healthy Start, after-school programs and family advocacy liaison. These programs could not help the Mong community. The Mong children were struggling in school and the parents were being left out for services. What did the services do? What was happening?

As a teacher in the school district, the author began to advocate for the Mong children and parents. The author wanted to help the Mong students do well in school and at same time not isolate them and their parents from the school. Together, some colleagues, Mong parents and the author established an after-school program for Mong students to learn their language, culture and tradition; and got help in their homework. The program was open to the Mong children and any member of the community at large who has an interest. The Mong Literacy and Homework Helper after-school program at Westside Elementary School was a project that had Mong parents' greatest school-involvement.

During this after-school hours program, there were amazing things happening to shake the Mong and non-Mong communities in California North Coast. It had tremendous impact on the communities especially the Mong community. The author was quoted by Shelton (1998) in a *Time-Standard* newspaper, “I want to be there to help them, be there to create a path that the younger generation can follow and move on...to higher education” (p. B3). A Mong student who attended the program was also quoted on her learning experience of the Mong language in the

p. 66 program, “Now, it's easier. It's fun. It feels great” (p. B3). A Mong student described the benefit he received from the after-school program:

The homework helper part is great. It is very important for me because there is always someone available to show me the direction to do my homework. It is helpful for me because after I understand the homework direction, I can do the work myself. But, if I don't go to the program and I got stuck in a problem, I basically give up my homework. I don't turn it into my teacher because I going to get all wrong anyway. The program really show me how to do my homework. I like it (Vang, Personal Interview, 2 June 1999).

This after-school program had driven so much energy to bridge the Mong community, the school district and the community at large to build a positive relationship to open up a line of communication through their volunteer. Also, it provided the opportunity for them to learn from each other's culture through tutoring one another and for Mong parents to have space for knowledge growth in education. This program helped Mong parents to make their transitional paradigm.

The author's experience living in California North Coast was that the Mong culture was viewed as very foreign and was alienated by some Americans, schools, businesses and other service provider agencies. The Mong community faced many incidents involving racial stereotyping and religious discrimination. Mong families were stereotyped to have many children and to be poor. Weinberg (1997) stated that the two issues on school desegregation in La Crosse and Wausau, Wisconsin involved Mong families because there were too many Mong and low socioeconomic children enrolled in their neighborhood's elementary schools. The school

board wanted to distribute these students into all the elementary schools around town to have fewer minority and poor students in their neighborhood's schools. The views of Mong people, Mong culture and Mong tradition have never been revealed positively. The Mong's family structure has a uniqueness and it's a treasure to the Mong people. This is part of their sacred tradition. Once upon a time, all cultures had a very large family similar to the Mong people but we forgot this beautiful tradition. We were disconnected with a narrow mind due to social costs. A Mong parent shared the importance about his large family: p. 67

In my family, I had eleven brothers and six sisters. Now, I have over one hundred nieces and nephews. I want to continue to carry on my parent's tradition and belief. I have four sons and five daughters. My parents were very happy because there were seventeen of us to look after and care for them. When my parents passed away all my eleven brothers and my sisters had a very big funeral services for them. I am sure the reason they want to have many children because that is what they want. During their funeral, they can't speak to me but I am sure they must be very happy. One day when I die, I am hoping my children would do the same for me too (Yang, Personal interview, 31 May 1999).

Since there were many racial issues involving the Mong people due to a lack of cultural and diversity appreciation, the Mong parents in California North Coast became very cautious about who they should collaborate with, especially for non-Mong speakers in schools, businesses or any other public service agencies. They wanted to avoid having problems with cultural misunderstanding.

Conclusions

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In this study, I found that school personnel, Mong parents and Mong students work well together by building a positive relationship through home cultural education and school information exchange. Mong parents love to share their oral traditional stories, customs, food and values. Educators can also share their stories and this modern culture involved literacy with Mong parents. A mutual trust and friendship between Mong parents and educators can bring greater communication and enthusiasm for Mong parents to become involved in school. Teachers who are committed to Mong children's education successfully established long lasting relationships with Mong parents. Educators with a mutual understanding and respect for how the Mong family's culture operates and traditional belief, and recognizing that most Mong parents do not have a formal education, are effective ways to accommodate Mong parents to involve in school. Also, a meaningful parent-involvement should be encouraged by school personnel who can speak and understand their language. This will bring in a substantial high number of Mong parents to participate in school functions.

This research found that Mong parents have the greatest expectations for their children's education. All Mong parents want their children to be successful in school. Some parents continue to regret that their skills from pre-literate society do not equate with this literate society. They are unable to provide the necessary tools to support their children's education. Mong parents also have a different set of values and beliefs in the Mong culture. They feel powerless when it comes to discipline their children in order maintain family values and study in

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school. The Mong children's perspectives in the American culture do not carry a similar values as their parents. They think freedom in America means to give them the authority to make their own decision. Most of the time, the decisions made by Mong children create more trouble in the school and at home.

My research shows that Mong students' struggle involved both in school and at home. School is a whole new different world for them. The information they learned from school has no relationship to the world they live at home. An educational environment to help Mong children learn must reflect both the home culture and school culture. In this way Mong children can relate from personal experience to motivate their learning. Relevant Mong history and culture included in the school's curricula would help Mong children to identify their culture and values. Maintaining their culture and language is a powerful way for Mong students to make wise decision biculturally. Tremendous peer pressure, information gained from school and media exposure create major conflict between Mong children and parents. Conflict between the Mong and American culture caused a predominant disaster in the Mong family. Mong children have to go through several risks while they make the transition between their home culture and school culture.

The Mong literacy and homework helper after-school program is one alternative way to provide positive reinforcement for Mong students to make a smooth transition in both home culture and school culture. The Mong students who participated in the after-school program had greater

appreciation for their home culture and resulted in less difficulty in school. The Mong parents who consistently volunteered in the program gained homework assistance techniques to guide their children

and help other siblings at home. The teachers who volunteered in the after-school program gained important information about the Mong culture and incorporated it into their lessons in order to work with Mong parents and students.

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At Westside Elementary School, the author found that the teachers who are dedicated have increasingly helped many Mong families to understand their rights and responsibilities involved with their children's education in the public school. These teachers are able to bring many Mong parents into school and create a non-threatening classroom environment for Mong students. Some teachers even take Mong language lessons from the author to be able to communicate with Mong parents and students. The outreach efforts to Mong parents and students by some teachers at Westside Elementary School made the school a home for education and created warm welcoming environment to the Mong community on the California North Coast

Recommendations

To School Staff:

School personnel should become culturally sensitive and have respect for the Mong cultural tradition. It is important that all school staff have an on-going cultural training and basic greeting lessons from a Mong educator before they work with Mong parents. School staff must learn to allow Mong parents to make decisions regarding their children's education. It could take days or weeks before Mong parents can come up with their decision. Most importantly, school staff must accept a second

decision made by Mong parents. Mong's second decision is always final. Mong parents often do not make quick decisions without thinking twice over the issue and consulting with their immediate family members like uncles, aunts, brothers, sisters and elders.

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Furthermore, school personnel should not have to wait for Mong parents to come forward and use their services. Services must be initiated by the schools and go directly to the home. Mong parents prefer services to go out to them. School personnel should not give up too quickly while reaching out to Mong parents. The more they reach out to Mong parents, the greater encouragement and positive views they have regarding parent-school involvement.

In addition, Mong parents do not always keep track of their schedules in writing. They tend to keep it as a form of oral culture. School personnel should constantly remind Mong parents when there is a meeting or event at school. Teachers who make personal phone calls to remind or invite Mong parents the night before an event bring the best record for Mong parents' attendance.

School personnel should work closely with Mong parents to construct a greater trust to Mong parents. Once Mong parents feel positive about school, then they have less fear about the school. Mong parents' fear in school usually comes from cultural and communication misunderstanding through the information given by their children. If school does not earn Mong parents' trust, then they believe that the school does not support them. School personnel should include Mong parents in the Mong children's education. They should be exposed to the various approaches to multicultural education that include the Mong culture as part of their teaching and learning. This way it will turn on

p. 72 Mong students' learning.

Lastly, school districts should hire more Mong staff to work in the schools. Mong staff should be paid by salary and not by hourly wages. If they are paid by the hour then they are not as committed or dedicated to help school reach out to parents beyond the unpaid hours. Schools should avoid hiring part time Mong educators to help Mong students in school or work with Mong parents. Schools should know how to use their Mong personnel wisely and provide training to help them work effectively with Mong students and parents. The author observed that most of the time Mong bilingual instructional aides are confused and do not know how to work with Mong students in the classrooms and reach out to parents due to lack of appropriate training.

To Mong Parents:

Mong parents should advocate for their children's education. They must learn to become independent. Mong parents should stop believing in their own system that if one of their friends or relatives attends a meeting then it is not necessary for them to attend. They should learn how to attend school meetings to represent themselves for their children. It is okay for Mong parents to be afraid and make a mistake at a meeting. The more Mong parents participate in meetings, the greater they gain leadership skills to involve in their children's education. It also helps them make a smooth transitional paradigm from pre-literate to literate society.

Mong parents should seek outsiders' support and advice besides the one from their own community. They also should form some kind of educational support programs or activities in the community and at

p. 73 home to help reinforce their children's education as well as their Mong language and culture. Mong parents should have the same value and expectation for both boys and girls. It is important for Mong parents to spend a lot of time playing and socializing with their children from preschool to high school ages. Mong parents should monitor their children very closely at home, in school and out in the community.

Furthermore, Mong parents should learn to speak soft and call their children by appropriate name. They must avoid using words that had negative meaning, such as *Laib*, meaning, "Punk or Gang;" *Tsuv Tum*, meaning "Tiger Killed;" *Maum Dlev*, meaning "Bitch;" etc. as a way to call their children's names. Also, Mong parents need to learn not to use Mong phrase like *Koj Nim*

Civ Civ Ncawj Le, meaning “You don't want to eat”, *Koj Yuav Maag Ntsov*, meaning “You will get hurt, I will lecture you, You had a problem, etc.” for Mong children. Most Mong children do not know the opposite meaning for these phrases. If the children do not understand the meaning then they will get upset and think negatively that their parents don't love them. The direct way to say “You don't want to eat,” is *Koj tsis xaav noj lov*. For *Koj Yuav Maag Ntsov*, parents should explain what exactly they mean by using this phrase.

To Mong Students:

The Mong students should maintain their culture and identity. They should preserve their heritage, at the same time add the mainstream culture to be part of their Mong American culture. They must learn to balance between the Mong culture and American culture with a respect and values. They should not put down their family values

and the values they learned at school.

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When Mong students face some kind of problem in school or at home whether it is related to education or not, they must seek help immediately. They should talk to their parents or teachers before the problem gets worse. If Mong students hide their problems until parents or teachers find out, then it is very difficult for them to work together. Mong children who know how to speak Mong and English should not learn to lie to their parents and teachers.

In school, Mong children must participate and ask questions. They should seek assistance from the teachers or peers when they have an academic problems. If there is any racial bias or discrimination against Mong students, they need to voice their concerns to school personnel to correct the problem. First, they must work with their teachers and let their parents know. If the same problem continues in school, then they should involve their parents with the school teachers and administrators.

Mong students should realize that their parents' world view is very different from theirs. Their parents' mentality still operates like back in Laos. They should involve and inform their parents in their education. They should also learn to ask their teachers for help to explain things about school to their parents. When Mong parents do not react to what Mong children's request, Mong children should not take it personally. They should slowly help their parents learn about certain things that would fulfill their needs in order to make them happy and successful in school like a typical American child. Mong children should not choose to abandon their parents. The more distance they are from their home culture, the less trust they receive from their parents. They need to be

sure to include their parents with them while mainstreaming into the American culture.

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Suggestions for Future Study:

During the course of this study, the author discovered several phenomena that need further investigations-involving Mong clans, family separation, single parent and divorce parents that

are on the rise. Longitudinal studies should be done to find out the causes. Most Mong families do not know about others who live in their neighborhoods. Mong children hurt one another and Mong parents through gang related activities. Youth alienation is a huge problem that separates the Mong children, parents and families in this society. The Mong people no longer feel safe in their community. Ethnographic studies should be conducted to find out what caused these problems.

Furthermore, Mong children continue to demonstrate low academic achievement and low scores in standardized tests in school. More qualitative studies need to be done in the areas of support for Mong children from classroom teachers, Mong bilingual teachers and Mong bilingual instructional aides whether this model will have an impact on Mong children's education.

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Parents:

Chang, T. California North Coast. 2 June 1999.

Her, B. California North Coast. 29 May 1999.

Hang, C. California North Coast. 31 May 1999.

Thao, C. California North Coast. 30 May 1999.

Vang, S. C. California North Coast. 1 June 1999.

Vang, Xee. California North Coast. 4 June 1999.

Xiong, D. California North Coast. 4 June 1999.

Yang, K. C. California North Coast. 31 May 1999.

Yang, K. P. California North Coast. 31 May 1999.

p. 81 Students:

Chang, T. California North Coast. 3 June 1999.

Hang, M. California North Coast. 3 June 1999.

Her, L. California North Coast. 4 June 1999.

Thao, B. California North Coast. 30 May 1999.

Vang, L. California North Coast. 2 June 1999.

Vang, S. California North Coast. 2 June 1999.

Xiong, P. California North Coast. 1 June 1999.

Yang, M. California North Coast. 29 May 1999.

Yang, S. California North Coast. 31 May 1999.

Teachers:

Fabian, E. California North Coast. 2 June 1999.

Intersimone, L. California North Coast. 3 June 1999.

Jackson, K. California North Coast. 2 June 1999.

Johnson, J. California North Coast. 2 June 1999.

Morton, D. California North Coast. 4 June 1999.

Powell, P. California North Coast. 4 June 1999.

Smith, S. California North Coast. 1 June 1999.

Tollefson, G. California North Coast. 3 June 1999.

Willis, T. California North Coast. 1 June 1999.

APPENDIX A

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Research Questions

English

1. What kind of environment would be supportive of Mong students' education success?
2. What kind of collaboration do Mong parents, teachers, and administrators need to engage in, to help Mong students to succeed in their education?
3. What kind of academic activities should you like to see happen to the Mong students engage in at both in school and at home?
4. What are some of the current challenges for communication between Mong parents and school?
5. Are after-school or weekend programs, such as homework tutoring and culture and language workshops, important for Mong students and parents?

Mong

1. Yaam xwm txheej dlaab tsi txhaj lug paab tau rua tsoom mivnyuas Moob txuj kev kawm ntawv moog kuam tshaajlij tshaaj plawg?

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2. Lawv le koj xaav ne, ntsug rua tsoom nam txiv Moob, xwb fwb qha ntawv hab cov thawj tsaav xwb tsev qha ntawv lug moog txhawb tsoom mivnyuas Moob yuav tsum tau nrhav txuj kev koomteg dlaab tsi koj lug paab cov mivnyuas kuas kawm tau ntawv?
3. Koj xaav pum yaam dlaabsti tshwmsim ntsug rua huv cov mivnyuas Moob txuj kev kawm nyob ntawm tsev qha ntawm hab huv vaaj huv tsev?
4. Lawv le kws koj pum ne, txuj kev tu ncuab hab nyuaj heev rua txuj kev sib thaam moog lug nyob ntawm tsoom nam txiv Moob hab tsev qha ntawv lub sijhawm nuav hab moog rua yaam lawm tom ntej yog dlaab tsi?
5. Koj puas xaav tas yog muaj chaw lug paab cov mivnyuas Moob hab tsoom nam txiv Moob txug kev ua hoovawj (homework), kawm lwm yaam lug hab lug yaam tsoog nyob rua lub sijhawm cov mivnyuas tshawb tsev kawm ntawv lawd, nwg puas tseem ceeb hab?

p. 84 APPENDIX B

CSU Monterey Bay M.A. In Education Consent Form

Project Title: Multicultural Learning Environment for Mong Students in the California Northcoast: Home and School Collaboration

Description of role that human subjects will play in the project, including what they will be asked to do, how much time it will take, questions they will be asked (if applicable), how their privacy will be maintained, risks and benefits they may incur.

I, _____ (Name of participant) state that I am over eighteen (18) years old and I wish to participate in a research project conducted by *Yer Thao* _____ (Name of Investigator)

In the case of a minor, I am the parent of _____ (Name of the child), I hereby give my consent for my child to participate in the research project conducted by _____ (Name of Investigator).

I acknowledge that *Yer Thao* _____ (Investigator) has fully explained to me the risks involved and the need for the research; has informed me that I may withdraw from participation at any time without prejudice; has offered to answer any inquiries which I may make concerning the procedures to be followed; and has informed me that I will be given a copy of this consent form.

In the event that I believe that I have suffered any physical injury as the result of participation in the research program, I may contact the Coordinator for the M.A. Program, Dr. Christine E. Sleeter at (408) 583-3641.

p. 85 I freely and voluntarily consent to my participation and/or my child in the research project. I

Do want to reveal my identity and hereby give my permission for the investigator to quote my name or my child's name in his/her thesis or project.

DO NOT want to reveal my identity and I understand that a pseudonym/fictitious or an assumed name will be used to quote my name or my child's name in his/her thesis or project.

_____Signature of Participant or a parent in case of a minor

_____Date

_____Signature of Investigator

_____Date

APPENDIX C

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TSHAU, XEEV (ASSESSMENT)

1) Npe: _____ 1 point _____ 1 point

2) Nub Nyoog Nub Nuav: _____ 1 point _____ 1 point _____ 1 point

3) Cov Tsaj Ntawv 22 points

4) Cov Suab 8 points

5) Cov Cim 4 points

6) Qha sab koj muaj tsawg leej tuab neeg nyob huv koj lub tsev? 11 points

Nwg Muaj 50 points

Yog koj tau 40-50 points = Kawm Nyob Chaav Kws Tshaaj Lij (Advance Level)

Yog koj tau 25-39 points = Kawm Nyob Chaav Ib Ntsaab (Intermediate Level)

Yog koj tau 0-25 points = Kawm Nyob Chaav Kws Qha Hauv Paug Ntawv (Beginning Level)

Koj tau _____. Koj tsaug moog kawm rua tug xwb hwb hu ua _____, qha chaav _____.

APPENDIX D

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Yer Thao, Coordinator

Mong Literacy and Homework Helper Program

School

September 1, 1997

Dear Parents and Teachers:

This student is participating in the Mong Literacy and Homework Helper after-school program. As the program coordinator, I appreciate for your continued support to the program. Please send with your student any school work that he or she may has trouble with and there will be tutors available to assist him or her.

In addition, I would like to ask you to do me a favor by keeping me inform either through notes, letters, FAX, E-mail or phone calls about how your student's perform academically while the student participates in the Homework Helper program. This will help the tutors and I better serve your student to meet his or her educational goal.

Thank You

Sincerely,

Yer Thao, Program Coordinator

p. 88 APPENDIX E

Student Name (Miv Nyuas Kawm Ntawv Npe): _____

Survey for Hmong/Mong Literacy and Homework Helper After-School Program (Dliam ntawv noog txug lub chaw kawm ntawv Hmoob/Moob hab chaw paab ua Homework)

Elementry School 1997-98 Students and Parents Survey

1) Why do you or your child attend this after-school program? Yog vim le caag koj txav txwm coj koj cov miv nyuas tuaj kawm qhov kev paab nyob tsua luj sij hawm cov miv nyuav kawm ntawv tshawb lawm? _____

2) Do you think the program helpful to you or your child? Koj puas xaav tas qhov chaw nuav paab tau koj tug miv nyuas lawm ntau? ____ YES (Tau Zoo) ____ NO (Tsis Tau Zoo)

Why (Yog Vim Lecaag) _____

3) Would you or your child like to continue coming to the program next year? (Koj puas yuav coj koj tug miv nyuas tsov qaab tuaj kawm nyob tsua lwm xyoo lawm?)

____ YES(Tuaj) ____ NO(Tsis Tuaj)

Why(Yog Vim Lecaag) _____

4) Do you or your child like the program to provide the same services as this year for next year? (Koj puas xaav kuam lub chaw nuav txuj kev paab tsua cov miv nyuas nyob le qub los kuam pauv?)

____ YES(Kuv Xaav Pauv) ____NO(Tsis Pauv)

Why(Yog Vim Lecaag)_____

5) Do your child or you have any comments? (Koj puav tshuav lug dlaab tsi xaav has? Thov sau tsua ntsaag qaav nuav.)

AFTER SCHOOL LANGUAGE LITERACY PROGRAM

p. 89

The After School Language Literacy Program is for both students and parents.

REGISTRATION FORM

NAME:_____ ADDRESS:_____

PHONE:_____

STUDENT TAKING CLASS ____ PARENT TAKING CLASS ____

YOUR SCHOOL ATTENDING? _____

Which class or classes do you want to take? Check one or all.

____ 5:00 p.m.-6:30 p.m. Hmong Literacy

____ 6:30 p.m.-8:00 p.m. Beginning Lao Literacy

____ 6:30 p.m.-8:00 p.m. Homework Helper

EMERGENCY INFORMATION: In case of emergency, please name a responsible adult to whom your child may be sent to if you are no home.

NAME:_____ ADDRESS:_____ PHONE:_____

NAME:_____ ADDRESS:_____ PHONE:_____

Please sign below if you have read the program policy and give your child permission to attend the program.

_____ Parent Signature

_____ Date

APPENDIX F

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Yer Thao, Coordinator

Mong Literacy and Homework Helper Program

School

May 5, 1998

Dear_____:

All the students, teachers and I would like to invite you to the Mong literacy's annual awards and celebration that will take place on June 3, 1998 at 5:00p.m. The event will be in the Multipurpose room at Elementary School

We hope that you can join us celebrate this fun event as a way to end our Mong literacy class for the 1997-98 school year. After the awards, there will be a free pizza party for everyone. This year nine students representing all three classes will receive their academic achievement and citizenship awards. Please come and help us cheer for them. If you have any questions please call me at Elementary School. We are looking forward to seeing you at the event.

Thank You

Sincerely,

Yer Thao, Program Coordinator