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THE HMONG EXPERIENCE IN SCHOOL

By

Jessica Buckless

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Teaching.

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

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“There is no end to education. It is not that you read a book, pass an examination, and finish with education. The whole of life, from the moment you are born to the moment you die, is a process of learning.”

Jiddu Krishnamurti

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Hmong families began to immigrate to the United States in 1975 from the northern mountain regions of Laos after the Vietnam War ended. Many families during this time were pushed out of Laos into parts of Thailand, where they lived in refugee camps before coming to the U.S. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2000, there were a reported total of 170,000 Hmong people living in the U.S. in the year. (“Hmong Immigrants,” 2015).

According to the New York Times:

There are 4.5 million American-born children of unauthorized immigrants and another 775,000 children who are themselves unauthorized immigrants. Few encounter brazen discrimination, but many are warehoused in overcrowded, ill-staffed and effectively segregated schools. They drop or get pushed out, prepared only for the brawn work and domestic labor no one else will touch. They live in fear that their families will be deported. (Kirp, 2015)

The Midwest was one of the places where a large number of Hmong families settled together, which is why we see such a large population of Hmong families in this area. The Hmong population in the Midwest will continue to grow as most households average more than six persons per house or apartment (Pfeifer, 2003). As a teacher working among this community, it is important for me to look into how families experience education, so that I can focus my teaching on what will best benefit their educational needs.

Background of the Researcher

I have a strong passion for working with diverse groups of students. I grew up on an American Indian reservation in northwest Montana. Growing up, I had the unique experience of living in two different worlds. My mother is an enrolled member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (located in Northwestern Montana) and my father comes from an English background. Growing up and having been influenced by my heritage, I always felt like I did not fit into a particular cultural group because I represented multiple cultures. I believe this has helped me become more understanding and open to differences among people. My upbringing has also played a large role in my desire to teach students of diverse cultures.

In college, I found that many people were unfamiliar with American Indian culture. I felt like this experience gave me a unique voice in classes of students where I was able to share more to help people understand my perspectives as a minority student in the classroom. This ultimately helped to improve my experience in school. Often, I find that people are very interested and compelled to ask me more questions when they hear about my background.

My grandfather was among many young men and women from our tribe to attend a Jesuit Catholic school on our reservation. Many American Indians living on reservations during the time that my grandfather went to school were forced to attend Catholic and segregated boarding schools. At that time, many American Indian students were asked to assimilate and to not be Indian during school. They were forced to cut their hair and to give up their native languages and other cultural activities to assimilate into “American” school education. Eventually, my grandfather earned his doctorate degree in education and started one of the first tribal colleges in Montana. Today, it is still thriving with over

2,000 students. His experience in assimilation is something that has inspired him to make a difference in American Indian education. The type of assimilation and discrimination that my grandfather experienced is similar to that of many immigrant families today. Being American Indian in public school during my grandfather's time meant that you were different and schools didn't tailor to your background in order to make you feel relevant or capable.

This fall, I embarked on my first teaching position in an elementary charter school for Hmong students. In my classroom, there are Hmong and African ethnicities represented. I have enjoyed working with this group of students and having the opportunity to see how their experiences in school will be a valuable part of my job. When working with marginalized students, I feel that I have a deeper understanding of what they may be facing because of my personal story. My family history has inspired me to research different cultures and ethnicities and how they have adapted to mainstream American life, in and out of school settings. This is why I am compelled to find out more about the Hmong experience in schools.

Research Question

The research question that will guide this capstone paper is: "*What is the Hmong experience in school?*" This study will specifically highlight Hmong experiences in a Midwestern charter school. According to the school superintendent, he felt that starting a Hmong charter school would benefit the Hmong population living in a Midwestern city that weren't getting the proper differentiation that they needed in the public school system. It also allowed for many immigrant students to feel safe and comfortable in a school environment, while being allowed to simultaneously celebrate their culture and be around other students with similar heritage. I hope to survey parents with students in our school

to learn more about their perspectives of the school and what they value about their child's experience in a Hmong-focused charter school.

Summary

Chapter One introduced the research topic on the Hmong experience in schools and described the researcher's background and educational path to learning about the Hmong culture. Chapter Two focuses on Hmong immigration history and the current educational standing of Hmong students according to national and statewide data. Chapter Three explains the research design. In chapter four, the results of the survey data will be described. Chapter Five is a reflection on the capstone and implications of the findings.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to present the literature around my leading question: *What is the Hmong experience in school?* Chapter two will begin with an overview of poverty within Hmong communities, Hmong gender roles, highlight specific Hmong leaders today and provide an overview of current educational standing of Hmong students. It will then compare and contrast various definitions regarding culturally relevant pedagogy regarding minority students in schools. Following the definition of culturally relevant pedagogy, an examination of the model minority in reference to the Hmong population will be done.

Poverty Within Hmong Communities

Families and home environments directly affect a student's achievement in a school setting. In Asian-American families, 82% of children are under the age of 18 and living in two-parent households. A larger amount of Asian-American families live below or at the poverty level than White and African American families (Siu, 1996). In Minnesota, 26% of the 66,000 Hmong people living in the state are living in poverty (Aslanian, 2015). In the Hmong community, family contributions are important for farming and other trades; families have high expectations of the younger populations contributing to the family. Many young Hmong students get jobs at young ages to help support their large families. The average Hmong family size is six (Yang, 1995).

Hmong Gender Roles

Gender roles seem to play a huge role in the academic success among Hmong students. Traditionally, the men would be expected to get the education and make the money for the family. Women were expected to stay home and raise the children and help with household chores. As the Hmong population has assimilated to American culture, many of the academic expectations of the young girls have shifted as well. Some Hmong women still face the difficulty of handling high family expectations as well getting a post-secondary education or job. Vang (1999) observed this in his research stating that some Hmong women in his study were unable to complete their high school due to early marriage and pregnancy. They may find themselves in poverty due to this (Vang, 1999). Vang also notes that some Hmong parents may not support their daughters going to college for fear that their daughter might be “too old” to marry after earning a college degree. Some Hmong girls struggle with this concept and some challenge the traditional Hmong expectations for women by earning college degrees and taking on the working world. In 1999, 5% of female Hmong students pursued a degree in higher education, compared to 21% of male Hmong students. Vang also noted that one third of Hmong-American educators are females which means that there is a strong push to become educators to change the success rates of Hmong students. He notes that perhaps women who are getting higher education degrees to be educators will be more respected by their families and the Hmong community. With these statistics, I’m hoping to find new perceptions and views involving my research topic of the Hmong experience in schools.

Model Minority Stereotype

Asian American students face another challenge of being stereotyped as the model minority, referring to an image of Asian-American students being diligent and high achieving. Being the model minority, for many students, can seem like a vast expectation. An expectation that is filled with predispositions and prejudgments based on past successes of Asian American students and professionals. A book written by Chou and Feagin (2008), titled, "*Myth of the Model Minority: Asian Americans Facing Racism, Second Edition,*" addresses the personal perspective of Asian Americans who have faced the challenges of being subjected to the "model minority" stereotype. They found that although the interviewees were from various places in the United States and ranged from all ages and careers, that each person had experienced racism at some point in their lives. The authors challenge the ideal that Asian Americans are "favored" and allow the reader to explore different perspectives on the "model minority" (Chou & Feagin, 2008).

Nicolas Kristof, a writer for the New York Times, published an article titled, "Why Are Asian Americans Living in America So Successful?" Kristof notes that just as African Americans can be impaired by anxiety from negative stereotypes, Kristof noted, Asian American students are bolstered by a "stereotype promise" that assumes that they are smart and hardworking by default (Wang, 2015). Mai Moua addresses the Hmong relationship to the Model Minority in an honors project for Macalester College. Moua states, "Because of their short history in the U.S, it is problematic to expect them to be the model minorities. However, like other Asian groups, the Hmong are positioned under this stereotype" (Moua, 2009, p.4).

According to authors Lee and Kumashiro (2005), there are four aspects to the model minority stereotype.

The aspects are, [1] Asian Americans are extremely hard working, perhaps more than whites: [2] they are highly intelligent and educated, especially in the fields of math and science: [3] economically successful in comparison to other minority groups: and [4] highly adaptive to American Life because of their presence in the suburbs and their largest rate of interracial marriage with Whites (Lee and Kumashiro, 2005, para. 6).

While groups such as South Asians tend to be more prepared to succeed, groups such as Southeast Asian, tend to have comparatively low academic and economic status. In particular, Southeast Asian Americans seem to be inappropriately labeled as “model minorities.” As other “model minorities”, they are viewed as hardworking and high achievers. On the other hand, they are also separated from this circle as high school dropouts, gangsters, and welfare dependents. Among Southeast Asian American groups, Hmong American are perhaps the most distant from “model minorities” (Moua, 2009).

In comparison to the Hmong community, while groups such as South Asians tend to be more prepared to succeed, groups such as Southeast Asian tend to have comparatively lower academic and economic status. In particular, Southeast Asian Americans seem to be inappropriately labeled as “model minorities.” These groups of Asian Americans include Vietnamese Americans, Hmong Americans, Cambodian Americans, and Lao Americans. (Moua, 2009, p.4)

At Risk Students

In a study done by Robert Slavin and Nancy Madden (1989), they took a deeper look into what makes a student “at risk” and how we can help these students. By third grade, Slavin and Madden found that kids could be identified as at risk according to certain risk factors and in many cases, they directly affected the student’s probability of dropping out. They also found that their research showed that the students yielding “at risk” status were primarily of a minority ethnicity. One of the main focuses of their research was to find ways to help these students achieve academically. They found that full time kindergarten in most cases, had a positive outcome in first grade readiness but by second and third grade, the effects generally disappeared. A huge part of this research involved the age in which Hmong students would be learning English. Those students who learn at a younger age are more likely to grasp the concepts and have more a conceptual understanding of it later on in an elementary school setting. The critical age of learning English for many students occurred before age three. One of the most effective ways to reduce the number of children who will ultimately need remedial services is to provide the best possible classroom instruction in the first place (Slavin & Madden, 1989). The best possible instruction for bilingual, “at risk” students is to differentiate. According to Vang’s research, it seems as though a problem facing immigrant and ESL students is that many teachers do not differentiate their education. Like Dr. Vang’s research, (2005) there has been a very low standard for Hmong students getting a public education today (Vang, 2005). In relation to at-risk students, Hmong students who come from a disadvantaged home environment and culturally unique background, are among the poorest students, often poorer than other immigrants and refugee students in the American Education system (Vang,

2005). For some Hmong students, academic success can be challenging. Some of the contributions to low academic success includes poverty, overcrowded living, little to no healthcare services, malnourishment, vulnerability to abuse and mistreatment as well as unstable living situations. According to Vang, (2005) when young kids are alienated, especially in a school system, it leads to students having low self-esteem and a negative self-perception. Dr. Vang also noted that schools that don't have cultural representation within the classrooms are at higher risk of academic achievement gaps among minority students. Many Hmong communities come from farming communities and something as simple as implementing farming activities, games, or readings will empower Hmong students to feel comfortable in their learning environment. When home experiences are not included in a school's curriculum or classroom activities, it hinders students from sharing ideas or culturally feeling open to developing the language skills necessary to succeed in an academic environment.

Hmong Leaders Today

Along with many hardships that students from the Hmong community have faced in the public school system, such as language barriers, culturally unaware teachers and administrators, and other socioeconomic barriers, many have found success. There are college educated Hmong professionals in law, medicine and nonprofit management. The first Hmong politician, 32-year-old lawyer, was elected to the State Senate in 2002 (Lai & Arguelles, 2003).

The first Hmong person believed to earn a PhD is Yang Dao (Aslanian, 2015). This year, he turned 74. He and his family moved to the United States when Yang was offered a job at the University of Minnesota as a Southeast Asian specialist. Of the six languages that Yang spoke, English was one not one of them at that time. Sarah Aslanian with MPR news interviewed Yang and he

spoke about how challenging it was for him to learn English and how most nights he would spend at least three to four hours practicing his English skills. He mentioned how his fellow colleagues at the University of Minnesota were so gracious when helping him learn new words and answering any questions that he had. After becoming proficient in English, Yang traveled around the United States speaking to Hmong communities, urging young Hmong people to go to school. Being a Hmong immigrant himself and having earned a PhD, it seemed as though he was the perfect person to inform and motivate Hmong youth to go to school and pursue a postsecondary education. Yang says that one of the main ways Hmong youth can continue to be motivated is for the parents and elders in the community to learn English and teach the youth how important it is to learn English and go to school. When young impressionable students see their parents and grandparents earning college degrees and becoming proficient in English, they are more likely to also be motivated to learn English and go to school. He mentions that learning English is simply a way to survive in America.

"All the buildings along University Avenue were mostly boarded up and very unsafe to walk," Vang recalled. He and others would walk each Sunday from Selby Avenue and Dale Street, down to University Avenue to a church near the state Capitol. "Then we started buying buildings here, and renovating them, and then other Asians started coming here" Vang said (Aslanian, 2015). Vang also notes that now the generation that he is most concerned about is the American-born generation of Hmong people that still continue to have low-test scores and low graduation rates in public schools. There seems to be a disconnect with this generation of Hmong people as they are being raised up in Hmong households, but continuing to feel the pressures of the American popular culture.

Current Educational Standing

Today, there are many Hmong families living in the Midwest. When Hmong families first arrived in the United States, they lacked academic background, learning and other academic skills that are needed to succeed in public schools (Vang, 2005). Charter Schools can help close the gap for students looking for a specific focus, such as culture. When the Hmong community was new to the United States, Hmong students were not given a very good chance in the public school setting. In one interview with school personnel, they perceived Hmong students' academic achievement to be poor and felt that Hmong students were not "college material" and defined their language barrier to be their largest handicap in school (Goldstein, 1985). Only 14% of the Hmong population in Minnesota has a bachelor's degree or higher, with a high school graduation rate of 61% (Aslanian, 2015). Of the total Hmong population in the U.S. in 2014, 28% are reported as attending or having attended college or graduate school (Aslanian, 2015).

Dr. Christopher Vang is a professor from California State University who has published research and materials regarding Hmong education in the United States. Vang is a Hmong immigrant himself and has had a first-hand experience with Hmong public education in the United States. Much of his research showed that many Hmong students were underprepared for postsecondary education as a result of language and cultural barriers in public schools (Vang, 2005).

His research showed that only a small amount of Hmong students were prepared to go on to postsecondary school. Vang states that Hmong students are in need of intense, meaningful academic curricula if they are going to go on and receive a postsecondary education. He noted that there is research on a variety of other immigrant populations living the United States regarding academic success,

but there has been little research on Hmong-American students regarding academic success and scholastic obstacles. Hmong students in the United States continue to grow exponentially and the academic impediments they face require attention if they are going to succeed, according to Vang. The academic struggle has been going on since the Hmong population first arrived in the United States and public schools faced a multitude of problems with instructional methods to address their specific learning needs.

Hmong students were placed in classes with little expectation to succeed. Many students felt that they would not succeed in public school settings. Administrators felt that it was very important for Hmong students to receive a high school diploma so that they could enter the workforce, but thought that they were most likely not college bound. (Vang, 2005 p.3)

School officials wanted to place Hmong students in classes in which they would fulfill only minimum graduation requirements because Hmong students were placed in classes based on an expectation that they could not successfully attend college, despite students' individual desires for higher education. Public school administrators also felt it was very important for Hmong students to receive their high school diplomas to enable them to enter the workforce, since they would not be college bound (Goldstein, 1985). Hmong students in public schools today still face many challenges regarding language skills as well as many other challenges that often putting them at a vast disadvantage in a public school setting. "Culturally, the Hmong population regards themselves to be reserved and teachers often overlook their reserved demeanor as working hard and quietly. Many Hmong students are not getting the proper attention in the classroom because of this" (Xiong & Lee, 2011).

Hmong students still perform with low-test scores, insufficient credits and low scholastic achievement due to English deficiencies. Many of the Hmong students attending public school today also don't have the necessary academic help at home from parents and guardians, because many Hmong families are refugees who lack any formal education to provide the necessary help in a home setting. Hmong families are very involved and want the best for their children, but don't have the necessary training or schooling to help in their child's achievement (Xiong & Lee, 2011).

Some Hmong parents believe that their children are at a disadvantage in public schools because they feel that school officials have low expectations of their children (Vang, 2005). Many public schools, including Minnesota public schools, continue to place Hmong students in English Second Language (ESL) classes as well as other language programs. In some cases, classes such as ESL classes really do help students in a positive way, but in many circumstances, grouping students based on their perceived language/academic level can undermine the student's true capabilities (Vang, 2005).

Charter Schools

Charter schools not only offer different classroom environments and learning opportunities than traditional public schools, but also, charter schools have more flexibility in what they teach, and in the way they go about teaching it. Since charter schools have more independence than other public schools, and are not held to the same regulations, they can utilize different teaching styles. While many public schools utilize a broad one-size-fits-all education style, charter schools have the opportunity to implement methods that work for specific groups of students, and they can explore topics that keep students engaged in the learning process (Staff, 2016).

In a study done by a student at Harvard University, it compared reading and mathematics proficiency of charter school students to that of their fellow students in neighboring public schools. It states that charter schools that have been in operation longer are more likely to have a proficiency advantage over their peers in the matched regular public school and that charter school students are more likely to have a proficiency advantage if their school has funding that is at least forty percent of that enjoyed by regular public schools. The results suggest that charter schools are especially likely to raise the achievement of students who are poor or Hispanic (Hoxby, 2004).

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

The research question is: *What is the Hmong experience in school?* Culturally Responsive Pedagogy as defined by Gloria Ladson-Billings is: “A pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural and historical referents to convey knowledge, to impart skills, and to change attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 1994). By embracing a student’s socioeconomic reality and history of student cultures, teachers are able to negotiate classroom cultures with their students that reflect the environments and communities of students. This can inherently help students learn and grow.

Another expert in the field of culturally relevant pedagogy, Sharroky Hollie, states that, “Teachers practicing culturally relevant teaching know how to support student learning by consciously creating social interactions that help them to meet the criteria of academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness” (Hollie, 2011).

Hollie also suggests that validation and affirmation of home culture and language can be a bridge connecting student success to academics and the real world. The use of Culturally Relevant Teaching can help students see authentic

representations of their life experience rather than seeing negative messages or connotations of their culture or ethnicity. This according to Hollie, is one of the most influential parts of building relationships with students.

According to Bic Ngo, University of Minnesota Associate Professor, It's important to understand Hmong culture to make education culturally relevant. Immigrant and second-generation Americans experience our educational system differently than other students. To create curricula that truly address the needs of all our students, we have to study the intersections of immigrant culture, race, class and gender in education. By integrating cultural knowledge into the classroom, we can create a collaborative curriculum that helps immigrant and second-generation students achieve and connect to their own heritage (Ngo, 2016, para. 5).

According to Ladson-Billings (1994), Hollie (2011) and Ngo (2016), culturally relevant pedagogy and teaching is an imperative part of teaching the diverse groups of students. When considering cultural competency, it's important for teachers and professionals to remember that culture goes beyond race. It includes youth, socioeconomics, gender, geographical, sexuality, religion and national identification (Hollie, 2011). Becoming culturally responsive means that teachers, as well as students have to negotiate new norms that acknowledge the similarities and differences of diverse groups of people.

Summary

All of the parts of this literature review help support the leading question to this capstone, "*What is The Hmong Experience in School?*" Chapter Two began with an overview of poverty within Hmong communities, Hmong gender roles, highlighted specific Hmong leaders today and provided an overview of current educational standing of Hmong students. It then compared and contrasted various

definitions regarding culturally relevant pedagogy regarding minority students in schools. Following the definition of culturally relevant pedagogy, an examination of the model minority in reference to the Hmong population will be done.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

This chapter will define the methods of the capstone research. The research process took into consideration all of the previously stated research reviewed in Chapter Two.

In the following chapter, I describe the research methods used to explore the topic of this thesis: *The Hmong experience in school*. The research utilized a mixed-methods approach by administering a survey to collect qualitative data. In documenting the survey, the researcher used the method of hand recording on a paper survey. Examples of previous research and surveys among a specific ethnic group was used to guide the researcher's questions.

A literature review for the following question: *What is the Hmong experience in school?* led me to form a descriptive study examining the Hmong experience in school. The purpose of Chapter Three is to describe the methodology and methods used in this research. A person's experience in school can be dependent on many factors. Some of those factors include setting, teachers, culture and language. Hmong students have been immersed in different school settings over the past thirty years. Highlighting those experiences in school is the focus of this research.

Rationale and Relevance of the Research Plan

The purpose of this research action plan is to identify the perspective of Hmong families and their experiences in school. The research included data collection through the administration of a survey. The survey questions are scaled

on the Likert Scale and qualitative data was collected through open-ended questions. This type of methodology is chosen to extend the comprehensiveness of findings and create a more broad and deepened understanding of respondents' experiences in school (Bamberger, 2012). Especially relevant to this study with an immigrant community, qualitative methodology is a “way of thinking that involves an openness to multiple ways of seeing and hearing, multiple ways of making sense of the social world, and multiple standpoints on what is important and to be valued and cherished” (Greene, 2007).

Based on the literature review presented in Chapter Two of my capstone, there has been a significant amount of struggle for the Hmong students attending American public schools.

In Minnesota the top four second languages for dual language students is, 34.1% Hmong, 28.3% Spanish, 6.6% Somali and 4.4% Vietnamese (Kindler, 2002).

[Hmong; blue, Spanish; red, Somali; green, Vietnamese; purple]

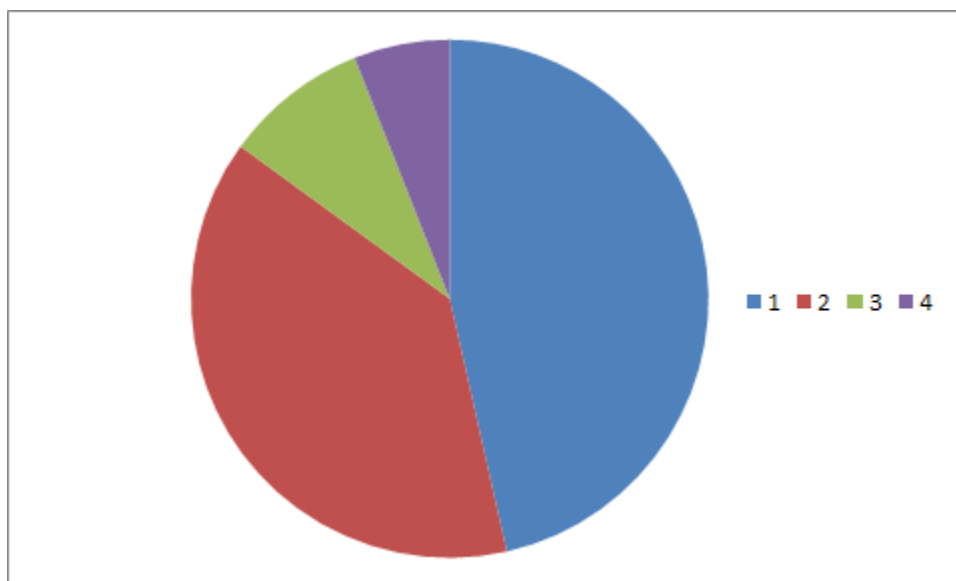


Figure 1. The top four second languages for dual language students in Minnesota.

As noted in the previous chapter, research suggests Hmong students' achievement or lack thereof, depends on public school settings. In some settings, education lacks the ability to accommodate ELL students through appropriate language immersion and translated texts. According to the cited text by Vang (2004), low socioeconomics also plays a role in the academic achievement of Hmong students. Hmong students fit the "at-risk" definition because culture, language, socioeconomic status, immigrant status, and environment limit their ability to perform in school. There have not been many resources available to help Hmong students succeed in American public schools. Research indicates that teachers who follow culturally relevant pedagogy are the necessary means for Hmong students to achieve educational success.

Participating in culturally relevant teaching essentially means that teachers create a bridge between students' home and school lives, while still meeting the expectations of the district and state curricular requirements. Culturally relevant teaching utilizes the backgrounds, knowledge, and experiences of the students to inform the teacher's lessons and methodology (Coffey, 2015).

Research Subjects and Setting

The following descriptive study took place in a Hmong-American Charter school located in an inner-ring suburb located thirty minutes outside of a Midwestern city. The research was conducted with the families of a third grade classroom. All of the families in the classroom were invited to participate in the research project by completing a survey that was sent home in a Wednesday folder provided by the school, or over the phone, if that was preferred. I made an excel spreadsheet with survey data upon receiving consent forms and surveys from parents that confirmed that they would like to participate in the survey. I waited to receive all of the consent forms before following up with Chapters Four

and Five of this capstone. I had all of the consent forms by Friday of that week, without having to do any follow-up phone calls.

The demographics of the school in which I surveyed is a public charter school district that serves a little over 450 culturally diverse K-8 students (89.2% Asian, 9.9% African American, 0.6% Caucasian, 0.2% Hispanics). Over 74.9% of students are economically disadvantaged urban students enrolled in the free and reduced lunch program. Moreover, 82.1% of the students are English Language Learners. The sample classroom is made up of 15% Liberian students and 85% Hmong students (Midwest Academy, 2016).

The students who attend the school come from the surrounding communities of the Midwestern city. The school has strategically increased in overall student population over its seven years of existence from 225 students to 469 students.

Data Collection

Approval for this research was obtained from the Hamline University Human Subjects Committee and my administration at my school. Surveys were completed by parents of students at the Hmong Charter School in which I teach. In order to gain informed consent from all participants, I personally explained the intent of my research and the purpose that the survey served when they chose to share their experiences in school. I explained the data collection process for the research study and let the families know that participation is completely voluntary and that they would remain anonymous. First, each parent was asked to sign a consent form and after I received consent, all questions were answered. The consent form was offered in both English and Hmong languages.

During the consent process, I gave students surveys to take home in their Wednesday school folders that the school provides, and there was be a box

provided on the survey to inform me whether or not the parents wanted to participate. After the forms were returned, I used their data to record and analyze for Chapter Four. Individuals were given the survey in English, with a translated Hmong version as well. I used a survey with a mix of both closed and open ended questions to get a better understanding of the respondents' experience in schools. I used a set of closed-ended questions to determine where the families that I surveyed are from, the number of kids that they have, the parents schooling and how long that they have lived in the U.S. Following the closed-ended questions, the survey also included open-ended questions for respondents to pursue an idea or response in more detail. The open-ended questions included questions about their experience in school and their perspectives about school. Individuals had the opportunity during the open-ended questions to share personal stories. I took notes of any personal stories that were shared during administration of the survey.

Table 1 includes a description and rationale for each survey question. The survey that was conducted was a parent experience in school survey that had questions regarding their personal experience in school and how comfortable they feel coming into their child's school. The survey questions were pilot tested on five teachers at the school that the research took place. The survey questions were changed to be more applicable when used on actual test subjects. Table 1 shows the wording, type and rationale for each survey question that I asked. Data from this survey were compiled to address the research question. The results of my research are shown in Chapter Four.

Table 1

School Survey

Survey Question	Type of Question	Rationale For Question
1. What is your relationship to the student in Ms. Buckless's third grade class at Midwest Academy?	One Answer Open-Ended	This question will help me to establish a better understanding of the interviewee and their relationship to the student in my classroom.
2. Gender	One Answer Multiple Choice	This question will help me to establish a better understanding of the interviewee.
3. Age Range	One Answer Multiple Choice	This question will help me to establish a better understanding of the interviewee.
4. What was your country of birth?	One Answer Open-Ended	This question will help me to establish a better understanding of how long the interviewee has lived in the United States.
5. If born outside of the United States, how long have you been living in this country?	One Answer Open-Ended	This question will help me to establish a better understanding of how long the interviewee has lived in the United States.

6. In what country did you attend school?	Open-Ended	This question will help me to establish a better understanding of the interviewee's educational setting.
7. What is the highest grade attended?	One Answer Multiple Choice	This question will help me to establish a better understanding of the interviewee's educational background.
8. My experience with schools in the U.S. has been positive.	Likert Scale: Strongly Disagree (1) Strongly Agree (5)	This question indicates the experience that the families have had in an American school setting.
9. What do you like most about U.S. schools?	Open-Ended	This question will help me to establish a better understanding of the interviewee's educational setting perceptions.
10. What do you like the least about schools in America?	Open-Ended	This question will help me to establish a better understanding of the interviewee's educational setting.
11. How many children by age, currently live in your household?	One Answer Open-Ended	This question will help me to establish a better understanding of the interviewee and their home setting.

12. How many adults by age, currently live in your household?	One Answer Open-Ended	This question will help me to establish a better understanding of the interviewee and their home setting.
13. For my child(ren) attending this school, I feel comfortable coming into my child's school to talk with a teacher or administrator.	Likert Scale Not Comfortable (1) Very Comfortable (5)	This question will give me good insight into how comfortable the parents feel when coming in to talk and engage with teachers.
14. Please Explain your answer from question 11. "For my child(ren) attending this school, I feel comfortable coming into my child's school to talk with a teacher or administrator."	Open Response	This question will allow parents to share their ideas and priorities in their child's education. The responses will be gathered and shared with teachers for potential to connect with parents.
15. What made you want to choose a Hmong focused charter school for your child(ren)?	Open Response	This question will allow parents to share their ideas and priorities in their child's education as well as the cultural perspective. The responses will be gathered and shared with teachers for potential to connect with parents.
16. How satisfied are you with your child's current school experience?	Likert Scale: Not Satisfied (1) Very Satisfied (5)	This question will allow me to get an idea of how satisfied the parents currently are with their child's school experience. The responses will be gathered and shared with teachers for potential to connect with parents.

<p>17. Please explain your answer from question 16. “How satisfied are you with your child’s current school experience?”</p>	<p>Open-Ended</p>	<p>This question will help me to establish a better understanding of the interviewee’s educational perspectives.</p>
<p>Culturally Relevant Education is defined as: <i>Culturally relevant teaching is a term created by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) to describe “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes.”</i></p>		<p>This will help give information of the definition to the families.</p>
<p>18. How important is culturally relevant education to you?</p>	<p>Likert Scale: Not Important (1) Very Important (5)</p>	<p>This question gives the parents an opportunity to be honest and the responses from this question will be shared with other teachers at the school to be helpful in their classrooms.</p>
<p>19. What do you think your child(ren)’s teacher could do to make their classroom culturally relevant?</p>	<p>Open Response</p>	<p>This question gives the parents an opportunity to be honest and the responses from this question will be shared with other teachers at the school to be helpful in their classrooms.</p>

20. If you could only pick one thing that will help your child do better in school, what would it be?	Open Response	This question gives the parents an opportunity to be honest and the responses from this question will be shared with other teachers at the school to be helpful in their classrooms.
21. How likely would I use a translator available when I come into my child's school.	Likert Scale Not Likely (1) Very Likely (5)	This will show me if there are any language barriers that affect the comfort ability of the families taking the survey.

Analysis of Information

The methods for the research described in this chapter are designed to answer my question: *What is the Hmong experience in school?* The research was developed using a qualitative approach from a survey data collection method. John Creswell tells us that a qualitative approach is one in which the inquirer often makes knowledge claims based primarily on constructivist perspectives (i.e., the multiple meanings of individual experiences, meanings socially and historically constructed. with an intent of developing a theory or pattern) or advocacy/participatory perspectives (i.e., political, issue-oriented, collaborative. or change oriented) or both. It also uses strategies of inquiry such as narratives, ethnographies, grounded theory studies, or case studies (Creswell, 2013). The researcher collects open-ended, emerging data with the primary intent of developing themes from the data. Qualitative data, such as open-ended interviews that provide actual words of people in the study, offer many different perspectives on the study topic and provide a complex picture of the situation (p. 535). The

qualitative data collected through open-ended questions was analyzed and coded inductively to identify common themes across families. These questions provided an opportunity for each family to share their own perspective and personal stories. In the analysis phase I employed the results to provide an in-depth and focused approach to analyze the corresponding qualitative narratives (p. 373).

Follow up questions were not necessary because I didn't feel that I needed a parent to elaborate on their survey response. If I had survey follow up questions, I would have contacted families via phone or email. A method that was used after the data was collected, was to have a separate pie chart table for the Likert scale questions and written out responses for the open ended questions. The first identifies the percentages for the Likert scale questions and the second elaborates on their open ended questions. For the Likert scaled questions, I took the data and calculated the total number of responses and then divide the number in each category by the total. This is called relative frequency statistics. Once the data was collected, I looked for common themes that emerged and presented them in Chapter Four summaries, pie graphs and analysis-structured writing.

Qualitative data analysis relies on both inductive and deductive reasoning. A large and fundamental part of data analysis is inductive— that is, identifying themes that emerge directly from the data (Ruona, 2005). Essentially such data are analyzed by counting the frequency that each response is mentioned (*Approaches to the Analysis of Survey Data*, 2001).

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

This chapter will discuss the data analysis and results from this thesis focused on: *the Hmong Experience in School*. The name “Midwest Academy” was given to the school in the results section to protect the privacy of the school where the research took place. The first portion of this section will describe the process of the survey and the data collected. Then, this chapter will analyze and interpret how the results apply to the research question by finding and defining trends and patterns that exist within the data. Furthermore, the results of this section will give specific examples of how parents have experienced their own schooling. The entire chapter will attempt to answer the leading research question of: *What is the Hmong Experience in Schools?*

Survey

The leading research question, literature review and the pilot test guided my focus when finalizing my survey questions. The survey questions and the rationale for each question are listed in this capstone. Chapter Two of this capstone was imperative to writing the survey because it gave me a better understanding the Hmong culture and different Hmong perspectives based on previous literature and research. Pilot testing this survey was vital to this capstone because I was able to try the questions out on other Hmong and non-Hmong teachers at my school and prompted me to make the necessary changes before I sent the survey home with my students. During the process of writing, piloting and finalizing my survey, I took into consideration the parents that would

be taking the survey and their various needs, such as translation and easy to read questions. In addition to making questions direct, I also made sure that the survey wouldn't take longer than twenty minutes to complete. Parents have busy lives and I wanted to make sure that they wouldn't feel burned by time constraints taking this survey.

After creating my survey in Microsoft Word, I electronically emailed it to my committee members and administrators to get their approval of the layout and to make any additional necessary changes. Once additional changes were made, I asked a colleague to translate both the survey and parent permission letter.

Upon receiving permission from my committee, I then submitted the necessary items to the Informational Review Board (IRB) at Hamline University. I received confirmation from the IRB and then requested permission to administer the survey from my school administrators via email before sending the consent form and survey home with my students. The consent form and survey was sent home with twenty-eight students in their Wednesday school folder. I requested that the survey was turned in the following day. By Friday of that week, all of the consent forms and surveys were returned. Nineteen of the twenty-eight parents had checked the box for participating in the survey and nine of the parents checked the box that said that they didn't want to participate in the survey. All of the surveys were turned in. There were twenty-one questions on the survey. Eight of the questions were multiple choice and thirteen questions were open-ended. Upon receiving the survey back, I noticed that on all of the surveys that were returned to me, one-third had about three to four unanswered questions. I am guessing this was because the parents filling out the survey did not have time to write out the open ended questions. The intent of my survey was to gather

information anonymously about different perspectives of experiences in school from parents of students in my third grade classroom.

Describing Survey Results

I took the survey questions and responses and organized them in a spreadsheet for easier organization to draw conclusions. The first step that I took in analyzing the results, was taking a close look at the whole group and how they answered each question. The survey included open ended questions as well as multiple choice questions that were measured by a Likert scale. The results from the closed-ended questions are summarized by calculating the mean scores for each response. The summary will also include analyzed common themes that begin to surface from the open-ended questions. By analyzing the survey, I gained a better understanding of different perspectives on school from the parents of my students. In the open-ended questions, I analyzed the content of the qualitative data looking for themes across interviews. Open-ended questions were asked to gain a better understanding of the research question, "*What is the Hmong Experience in School?*" That question continued to guide my focus when looking for common themes to emerge. The answers to the open-ended questions varied in response.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

	Total=19	
	Response	Percentage
Mother	15	78%
Father	4	22%
Gender		
Female	15	80%
Male	4	20%
Age		
25-34	10	52%
35-44	4	22%
45-54	3	16%

Did Not Answer	2	10%
Country of birth		
Liberia	3	16%
Laos	6	32%
Thailand	5	26%
United States	5	26%
Years living in this country		
1-2 years	1	5%
3-5 years	2	11%
6-10 years	3	17%
11-20 years	3	17%
21-30 years	2	11%
31-40 years	3	17%
Did Not Answer	5	22%

Country attended school		
Ghana	1	5%
United States	1	5%
Laos	1	5%
Thailand	2	12%
Liberia	1	5%
Did Not Answer	13	68%
Highest Level of School		
Primary School-Some College	11	58%
2-Year College	4	21%
4-Year College	3	16%
Did Not Answer	1	5%

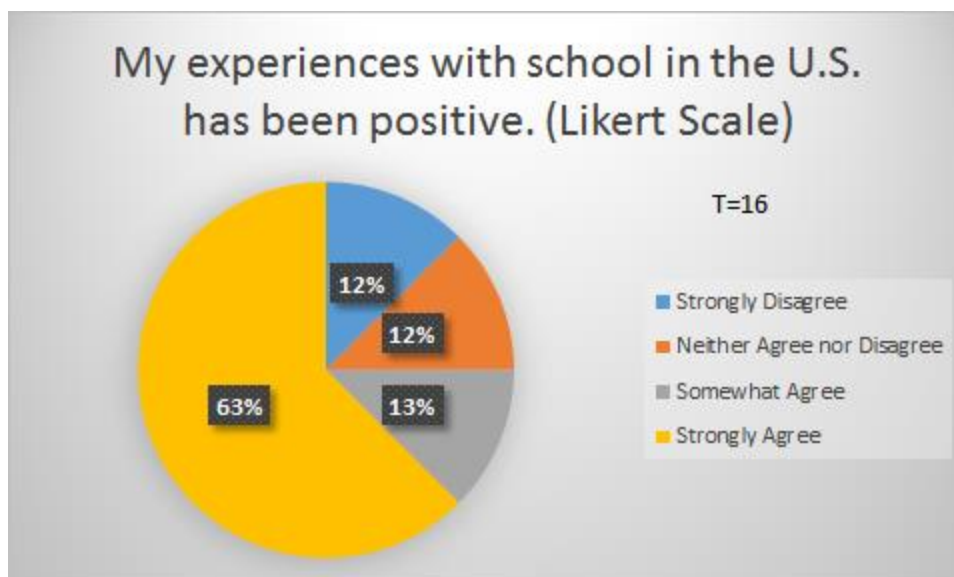


Figure 2. Representation of the answers to Question 8: My experiences with school in the U.S. has been positive. Scale ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). (13% for Strongly Disagree, 13% for Neither Agree nor Disagree, 13% for Somewhat Agree and 61% for Strongly Agree)

The results were, two for strongly disagree, two for neither agree nor disagree, two for somewhat agree and ten for strongly agree. Roughly 74% of the parents that responded to the survey were born outside of the United States and 83% of the parents that responded to the question of where they attended school, attended outside of the United States. School outside of the United States is significantly different. Survey results included the countries of Ghana, Laos, Thailand and Liberia all of which, are third world countries. These data are significant because the common theme that presents itself through this question is that the majority of parents from my classroom are from third world countries. It makes me wonder, do these data affect the way that these parents perceive schools in the U.S?

Third World comes from the French 'Tiers Monde.' It refers to all of the underdeveloped countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, not just to those that were neutral in the Cold War. Underdeveloped is a term of convenience not a judgment about the quality of all aspects of life in Third

World countries. It is a synonym for Third World, and one which is commonly used even among people from those countries. (Packenham, 2015, para. 3)

Almost all of the parents that responded to the question have attended school outside of the United States in a Third World country. This has a connection with their experience in schools because schools in third world countries are significantly lower performing with lower enrollment rates and school conditions are far worse than schools within the United States.

From 1999 to 2011, gross enrollment in pre-primary education jumped from 27 to 45% in developing nations, but more than 63 countries are far from meeting the United Nations target of 70% enrollment at this level by 2015. During the same period, net enrollment in primary education has increased from 82 to 90%, nearly halving the number of out-of-school children. Yet, 57 million primary school age children (mostly in sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia) are still not enrolled. A country's income per capita remains a key predictor of performance on international tests, and learning in many low- and middle-income countries remains appallingly low (Murnane & Ganimian, 2014, para.1).

The Hmong-focused charter school that this research took place in a building that is two years old. The facilities include, updated classrooms that have fifteen desktop computers per class as well as smart boards. As a teacher in a facility such as this, can lead to better experiences and opportunities for teachers and students to explore learning through new technology. I believe that school opportunity through technology, qualified teachers, and updated facilities make this charter school, truly unique and sought after by Hmong families. One parent responded by saying that the school is well known and that upon hearing good

things about the school, they enrolled their children. Another parent responded by saying that they enjoy their child being in a school where they can learn Hmong art and language.

Question 9: *What do you like most about U.S. schools?*

Some words that surfaced in one response to this question included, freedom, clean classes, opportunity and class choice. One parent specifically pointed out that there is equal opportunity for students to have a good education in the United States regardless of if students come from wealthy or poor families. Another parent mentioned that regardless of how many taxes a family pays, they have the opportunity to an equal and right schooling for their children. Another parent pointed out that they enjoyed having the opportunity to choose a major of their choice in college. Five different parents responded to this question by saying that they appreciated the opportunity to attend school for free, regardless of the family income and to have a choice of desired college degrees. A trend that represented itself was that just under forty percent of the families attended some form of college which leads me to believe that school is a high priority for these families. The open-ended questions also alluded to the fact that schooling and college was a high common goal with responses such as opportunity to choose the path of education of their choice and being grateful for such high quality/free school experiences for their children.

Thirty-seven percent of the parents are currently in college or have previously attended a two year or four-year college. This statistic tells me that college might be an expectation for these students.

Question 10: *What do you like least about U.S. schools?*

Some themes that surfaced in the responses to this question included, racism, police behavior, bullying to international students, lack of cultural

understanding, not diverse enough and school days being too long. The common concept that presented itself throughout six different responses, was related to race and culture. One parent was concerned about police brutality. The themes throughout this question varied greatly.

Lack of cultural understanding among people of color is not a new phenomenon and Hmong people are not a rare case of racial injustice. This parent response not only opened my eyes to the vastly growing uncertainty that can still thrive within immigrant communities regarding cultural misunderstandings in and out of schools today.

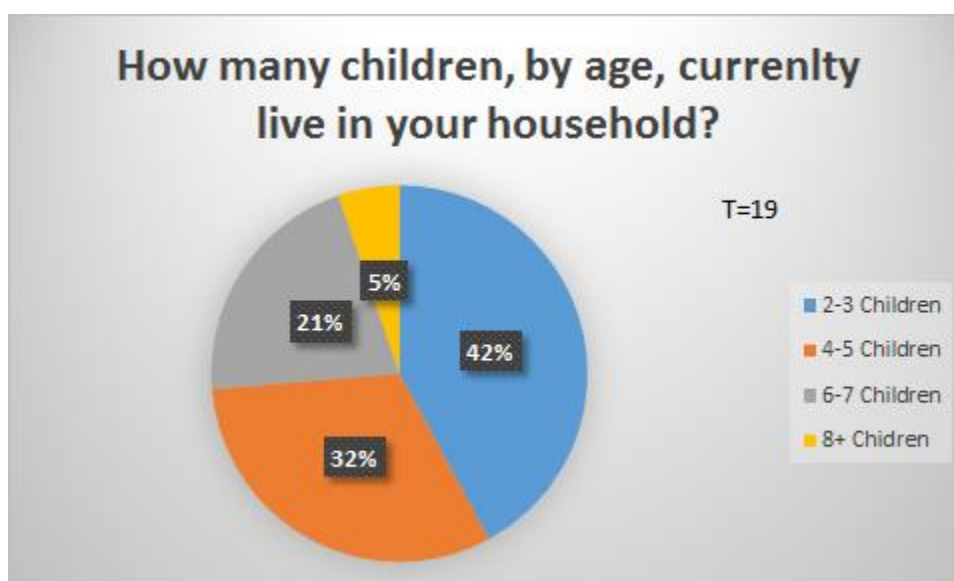


Figure 3. Representation of the answers to Question 11: “How many children, by age, currently live in your household?” Children numbers range from 2-3, 4-5, 6-7 and 8+.

The results were, three for two children, five for three children, four for four children, two for five children, three for six children, one for seven children and one for nine children.

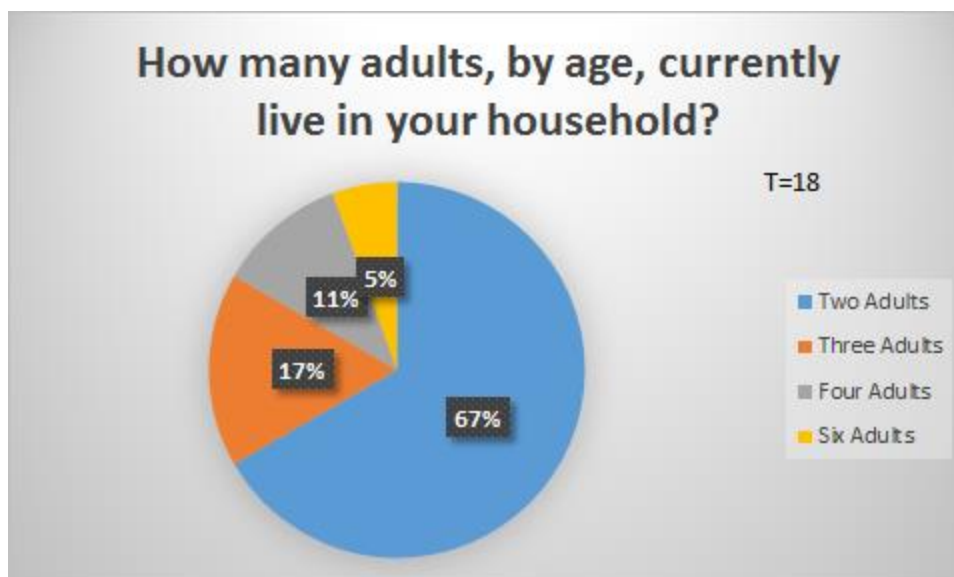


Figure 4. Representation of the answers to question 12: "How many adults, by age, currently live in your household?" Adult age ranges from two adults, three adults, four adults and six adults. (67% for two adults, 17% for three adults, 11% for four adults and 5% for six adults)

The results were, twelve for two adults, three for three adults, two for four adults and one for six adults.

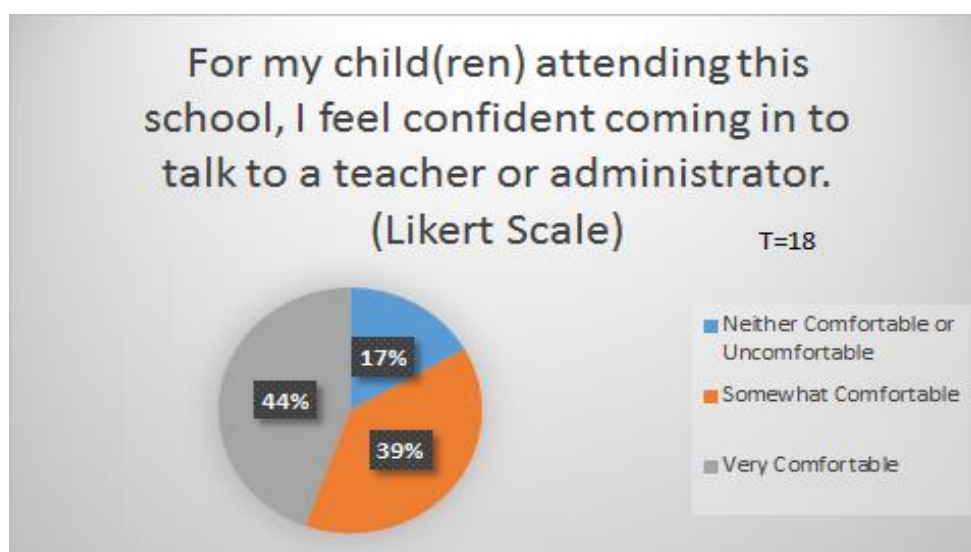


Figure 5. Representation of the answers to question 13: "For my child(ren) attending this school, I feel confident coming in to talk to a teacher or administrator." Scale ranges from 1 (not comfortable) to 5 (very comfortable). (17% for neither comfortable or uncomfortable, 39% for somewhat comfortable and 44% for very comfortable)

The results were, three for neither comfortable or uncomfortable, seven for somewhat comfortable and eight for very comfortable.

Question 14: Please explain your answer from question 13-*For my child(ren) attending this school, I feel confident coming in to talk to a teacher or administrator.*

One parent responded by,

The administrators can relate on a personal level, the teachers and the administrators at the school are like second parents to my kids, the teachers and staff are respectful and being able to speak our native language to school administrators is helpful.

When looking through the responses to this question, eighteen of the responses were very positive and seemed like the parents were pleased and confident with coming in to talk to administrators. There was one parent who responded with, “Even if I come in to talk with administrators, I don’t feel that they will change or do anything.” Another parent responded by saying that they are shy themselves so they prefer not to talk to administration unless necessary. Commonalities among responses seemed to be positive about coming in to speak to administrators at the school. The statements were very random and although I found commonalities, there was not a set number of specific themes.

Question 15: *What made you want to choose a Hmong-focused charter school for your child(ren)?*

One parent responded by saying, I want my child to know their culture, the school is well known in the Hmong community, my child can learn English and Hmong at the same time, it is a safe place for kids to learn and they push kids academically and to keep our Hmong culture alive. One parent responded by saying, “I don't really know why I sent my child to this school.” Another

responded by saying, “My brother works at the school and recommended it.”

Most of the responses appeared to have a larger purpose and goal for their child attending the school. This school is well-known among the Hmong community for allowing students to see themselves through mirror perspectives within their classroom and among the staff and student population. In the literature review, I talked about how the later a student learns to read and write proficiently in English, the higher the chances for the student to be “at risk.” Parents know that our school has qualified ELL and ESL teachers to help their children make the jump to reading and writing proficiently in English from Hmong. This may contribute to why parents think it is important for their students to attend our school. Our school provides Hmong literature, Hmong culture and Hmong art as a specialist rotation that students are on rotate on throughout the school year. This may be the reason that the parent comments were enthralled with the idea of their child experiencing “being Hmong” in a mainstream school setting.

With the school being a charter school, many parents commute or have their children take buses to attend our school. In my classroom, only three students are dropped off and picked up by their parents on a daily basis. Most of my students ride a bus. Some, from far distances. This tells me that this school is high priority, and it is intentional.

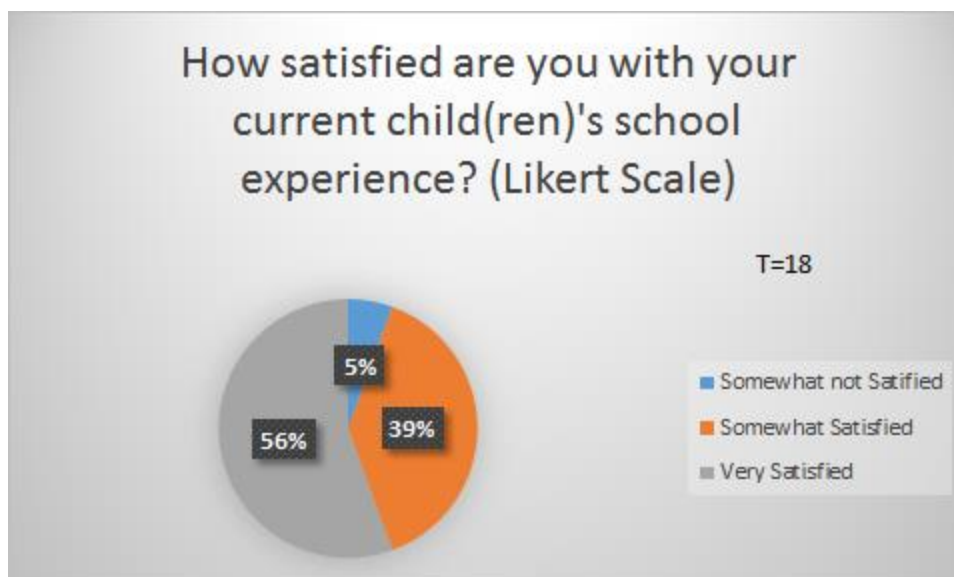


Figure 6. Representation of the answers to question 16: “How satisfied are you with your current child(ren)’s school experience?” Scale ranges from 1 (not satisfied) to 5 (strongly agree). (6% for somewhat not satisfied, 39% for somewhat satisfied and 56% for very satisfied)

The results were, one for somewhat not satisfied, seven for somewhat satisfied and ten for very satisfied. For this question, ninety-four percent of the parents responded by saying that they were somewhat satisfied or very satisfied. There are many factors that contribute to the student experience in my school. The parents that responded to the question by saying that the teacher is doing a great job and does her very best to let them know how their child is doing told me that, “I appreciated open communication that I have with my child’s teacher.” One thing that is common at my schools is open communication with parents. The school requires teachers to keep communication logs for each student and they suggest that you contact each family at least once a month to tell them the good, the bad and the ugly. Open communication is a priority.

Question 17: Please explain your answer from question number 16- *How satisfied are you with your current child(ren)'s school experience?*

Some responses included one parent stating, “The school prepares students well and scores well.” Another parent responded by saying, “The teacher pays

close attention to my child.” One parent wrote, “I like that teachers teach my child to read and write in English and Hmong and the school has been great for my children and their first year at the school.” There was a parent that responded, they are not satisfied with their child’s school experience because the school only calls them when the child does something wrong. I had another parent respond by saying, “The bus service at the school is very bad”. The overall common theme that emerged from this response was that at least half of the parents were satisfied with their child’s school experience in relation to their Hmong culture. The fact that seventeen out of nineteen parents responded by saying that they were either somewhat satisfied or very satisfied told me that the open responses were going to be positive, and they were.

Parents are made to feel that their children are a high priority which is something that also resonated with my survey results. One parent responded by saying that they really enjoy all of the hard work that the teacher does for their child. From the school’s website, there was part of the mission statement that I believe motivates families that have children attending our school and keeps them interested in coming back year after year.

The staff at our school believe that “all” children can and will learn if provided the right environment and support. We expect nothing but the very best from each and every child, every single day, starting with day one. Using the Responsive Classroom philosophy we have clear, succinct procedures to ensure that every second of learning is justly guarded. From teacher-to-teacher the focus is the implementation of clear procedures with the focus on student learning and consistency. (Midwest Academy, 2017)

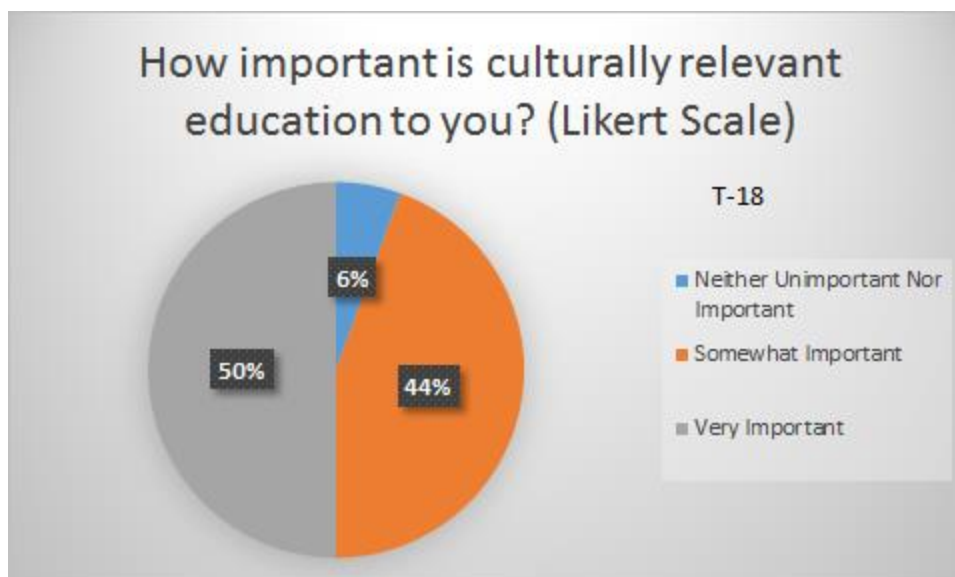


Figure 7. Representation of question 18: “How important is culturally relevant education to you?” Scale ranges from 1 (Not important) to 5 (very important). (6% for neither unimportant nor important, 44% for somewhat important and 50% for very important)

The results were, seventeen parents responded with somewhat or very important. Through the pilot test of my survey and through thoughtful conversation with colleagues, I was able to create a definition of culturally relevant teaching for parents that may have been easier for ELL or ESL families to understand: *“A pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes.”*

Ninety four percent of parents thought that culturally relevant education was somewhat to very important to them. This is significant and tells me that culturally relevant education is important for their children.

Question 19: *What do you think your child(ren)'s teacher could do to make their classroom more culturally relevant?*

Answers to this response ranged from, remind the students of who they are and that they matter, continue to use the Hmong culture to drive lessons, make sure the kids know that the Hmong language is useful. Some parents responded

by saying, “I’m not sure what the teacher could do to make her classroom more culturally relevant.” The overall common theme that presented itself in this question was 85% of parents wanted their children to feel that their culture and language were made prevalent in the classroom. It did not surprise me that most of the parents said that they wanted the classroom setting to be more culturally relevant. The school’s vision is stated on their website and posted for parents to see. I believe that it is the knowledge of the mission statement and vision of the school that drives parents to have expectations and opinions of classroom settings. The school prides itself on being Hmong-focused. In the mission statement of the school listed on the school’s website, it states,

The mission is to provide quality, relevant and multicultural education for all students. The unique framework is relevancy, which is a critical component for the learning process if and when the students can build on their prior knowledge. Learning makes more sense and is more connected when students can relate to the content and/or topics being taught. This school will serve students ages 5-14 in the metro areas. It will focus on these four cornerstones surrounding the educational philosophy of the school: A rigorous educational program focusing on core content areas and standards mandated by our state in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies, Hmong Heritage (native) language and culture, Responsive classroom/social curriculum and Up to date technology.

(Midwest Academy, 2017)

Question 20: *If you could pick one thing that would help your child(ren) be successful in school, what would it be?*

Five of the responses focused around after-school programs. One parent said, “I would like my child to have time for homework at school, so they aren’t

spending an hour on the bus doing work.” Another parent said, “I want my children to be more talkative and outgoing.” The overall tendency was that nearly all of the responses was that they wanted more after school opportunities for their children. With the school being in its second year at its current location, there are many things that are getting worked out. Including, after school programs, clubs, sports and other school activities that many of the parents would like to see at our school. In winter 2017, the school started a morning sports program for middle school after this survey was taken. Maybe the responses would’ve been different if this program was implemented before this survey. The school is very rigorous and this correlated with one response that stated that students are required to do a lot of work outside of school. In the school mission statement, it talks about how rigorous the academics and assessments are at the school.

The second design element at Midwest Academy is the use of multiple assessments. We utilize a balanced system of authentic, formative and summative assessments aligned to standards to diagnose the needs of our students. Assessment information is also used to help teachers plan next steps in instruction and provide learners with descriptive feedback they can use to improve the quality of their work. (Midwest Academy, 2017)

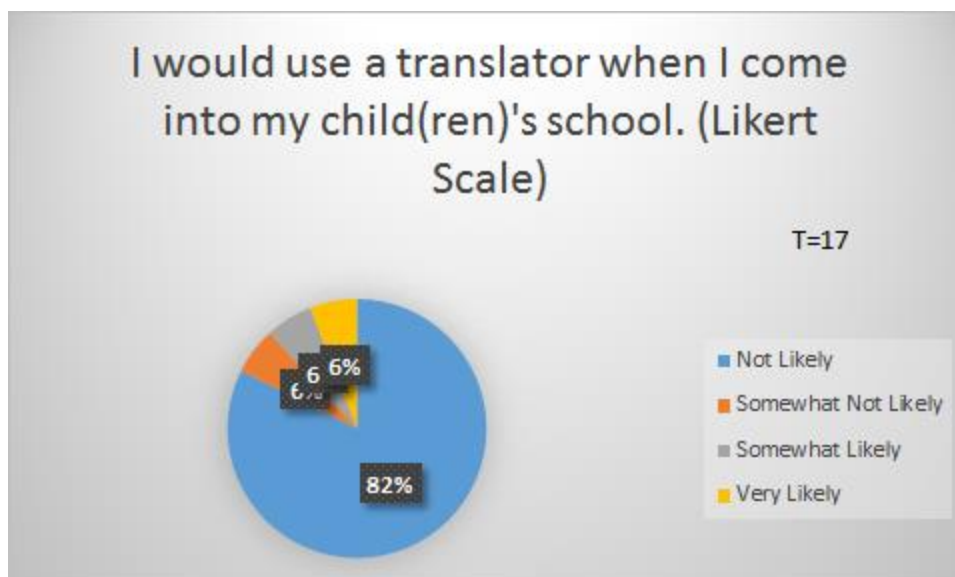


Figure 8. Representation of question 21: "I would use a translator when I come into my child(ren)'s school. Scale ranges from 1 (Not likely) to 5 (Very likely). (82% for not likely, 6% for somewhat not likely, 6% for somewhat likely and 6% for very likely)

The results were, fourteen for not likely, one for somewhat not likely, one for somewhat likely and one for very likely. I only had two parents that said that they would somewhat or very likely need a translator. I had 74% of the families respond by saying that they were born in another country. So this statistic surprised me, but also alluded to the fact that most of them feel proficient enough in English that they do not need a translator when they come into school.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This capstone research plan to answer the question, “*What is the Hmong experience in school?*” has opened my eyes to the various experiences that parents and my students have endured during their own school experience. I have a deeper desire to continue to get to know the families in my classroom and understand their stories. I believe that in doing so, that I can truly connect to my students and their families. The content in chapter four contained the open-ended survey question answers and multiple choice (Likert Scale) question results. To protect the confidentiality of the school, I used the alias “Midwest Academy.” I used a qualitative approach with my survey research questions and analyzing approach. Using a qualitative approach and paralleling themes, I was able to gather the information from the survey and I was able to gain a deeper understanding of the Hmong experience in school. This chapter will include my final conclusions and summaries of this capstone project. This chapter will also share my future goals as an educator and professional. The main purpose of this capstone was to gain a better understanding of the guiding research question, “*What is the Hmong experience in school?*” A deeper understanding of this question was discovered from a literature review. It has been concluded that the Hmong experience in school varies depending on individual. It has also been concluded that cultural competency in education is very important to those that were surveyed. Over fifty percent of the majority of the open ended questions regarding cultural competency highlighted the importance. It is because of the

importance of cultural competency that, I believe, led these families to send their children to a Hmong-focused charter school. This belief is based on my experiences at the school as an educator and it is also based on common themes that presented themselves through the survey questions. Comments like, I enjoy having my child in a school where they can learn among students and teachers that look like them. Another parent responded by saying that they really liked having their child in a school where they could learn more about their Hmong heritage.

Three Key Findings

The first key finding that stood out to me in this capstone research, was that the demographic of parents in my classroom are extremely diverse. When asked where my students' parents were from, sixteen percent of parents responded by saying that they were born in Liberia, 32 percent of the parents responded by saying that they were from Laos, twenty-six percent of the parents responded by saying that they were from Thailand and lastly, 26 percent of the parents responded by saying that they were born in the United States. This means that seventy-four percent of the families representing my classroom are immigrants. The diversity of my classroom is prominent. Looking out into my students, I can see that they represent so many diverse backgrounds. This study confirmed to me that the families behind my students are just as diverse as the sea of faces that I look upon every day. The diversity of my families has allowed me to further explore and seek out ways to help them academically and learn more about who they are in the process. This finding alluded to the fact that the goal in having a quality, valuable education does not vary depending on the part of the world that families are from. Each family, regardless of heritage, envisioned a quality education for their child.

The second key finding that stood to me was the school experience satisfaction rating of the parents. On survey question sixteen the question, “How satisfied are you with your current child(ren)'s school experience?” Resulted in ninety-five percent satisfaction rating. Thirty-nine percent of the parents responded by saying that they were somewhat satisfied and fifty-six percent of the parents responded by saying that they were very satisfied with their child(ren)'s experience in school. This finding was key to this capstone research because, it told me how satisfied that parents are to have their children in this charter school. This satisfaction was created through some experiences that were also prevalent in their open ended responses, like, enjoying that their children get to experience their culture at school. Another response that surfaced during the open-ended question regarding this experience in school was that they liked that there were high expectations for the students to achieve.

The third key finding that stood out to me was, that culturally relevant pedagogy was a priority for families. The question, number sixteen, “How important is culturally relevant education to you?” received a ninety-four percent response for being important. Forty-four percent of parents responded by saying that culturally relevant education was somewhat important and fifty percent responded by saying very important. The ideas of the school being culturally relevant for students was a theme that presented itself multiple times in my findings. In the open-ended questions about school experience and responses to the question of why parents chose a Hmong-focused charter school for their child. Some examples of these responses included how people wanted their children to attend a school where they would see reflections of themselves in teachers and students. Culturally relevant education is a huge reason why parents picked a Hmong-focused charter school for their children. Some responses that resonated

with me chose this charter school because of its reputation in the Hmong community. From the statistics of parent satisfaction, it seems to attest to the notable reputation.

Prime Focus

This capstone has brought me further knowledge regarding the experience in school with correlation to the parents of the students in my classroom. It has brought opportunities for open conversations with colleagues and administration about the survey results and how we can better serve the students in our school as well as noting the things that families really enjoy about our school. I had the opportunity to share my family's struggle with assimilation in school and found different comparisons that some immigrants are still facing today. This capstone allowed me to personally connect with families, colleagues and administration at my school. I feel that this capstone has prepared me for future research as an educator.

Returning to the Literature Review

Chapter Two of this capstone expressed different areas of information regarding the Hmong experience in school through researched areas of culturally relevant pedagogy, Hmong history and Hmong experiences today, as well as the model minority stereotype descriptions. The literature review section began with poverty within Hmong communities. This section was particularly interesting because it stated that over a quarter of Hmong people are living under the poverty line in Minnesota. I also found the statistic of Hmong families averaging six kids interesting. When I surveyed my families, the majority of them had two to four children. There was only one that had six or more children. It made me wonder what the family size average is for our entire school, and if this representation of family size was relevant to that of our entire school. The next section went on to

talk about the Hmong gender roles. Similar to other traditional cultures, women are expected to take care of children and be in the home. Throughout the paper, I mention different women that are pushing gender roles today. When I surveyed my families, many of the parents wanted their kids to academically succeed, whether the student was male or female. Most of the families responded by saying that the reason that they were at my school was because of the academic rigor. This supported the parts of my literature review that stated that there are successful professional Hmong women today and families look at young girls in a more progressive way, and want them to succeed academically and in the workforce. The next section speaks about the Model Minority stereotype and how Hmong people fit into the Model Minority stereotype. There was another parent that wrote about how they wanted their child to have better opportunities of school choice in the United States. After that, I touch on at risk students and how there are many factors that lead to Hmong students becoming at risk. Being at risk can be related to low socioeconomic status that can include parents not having an education. After my survey results, I noticed that half of the families that participated in the study had some form of college experience. The second to last section in the literature review talks about Hmong leaders today that are paving a way for younger educated youth and lastly I talk about Hmong students current educational standing and charter schools. The biggest connection to the literature review that I found, was that many of the new generation of Hmong parents really want their children to succeed academically, regardless of traditional gender or race barriers.

Limitations of the Study

After analyzing my survey results, several complications became present to me. This meant that most of my class and their families did the survey, but

there were nine families that opted out of doing the survey upon turning the survey back to me. By opting out, they checked the box on the returned survey that that said, "I do not want to participate in the survey." I did not get further information on why the nine families opted out. This may have been because of the time constraint of taking the survey.

Mastering how to make classrooms culturally relevant can take teachers a long time. There are many ways for teachers to make the classrooms culturally relevant. Some ways include, reading appropriate texts and going to appropriate professional development opportunities. As a teacher, I know that the amount of free time teachers have for these activities is very limited. This may be a relevant complication to understanding how to properly make classrooms culturally relevant. Another suggestion to making classrooms culturally relevant is to allow students' voices to be a part of daily routine. When understanding the question: *What is the Hmong experience in schools?* It made me realize that every parent that took the survey has had a different experience, as a student in school. Overall, I am still left with the question of what we can do to make classrooms more culturally focused.

The first limitation was that the results may not have been a good representation of all students in my school, or even all of the students in my classroom. I wanted to keep the survey short and concise, but it still ended up being twenty-one questions. If the survey had been shorter, maybe more of my parents would have agreed to take the survey. I also gave the survey to my students on a Wednesday, so that they would put it in their Wednesday folder. It asked the parents to return the survey to me the next day. If the parents would've had a weekend to fill out the survey, maybe I would have had more parents consent to taking the survey. I asked the students to turn in their surveys the next

day because that is always the school policy when they send something home to be signed in the Wednesday folder. I wanted to be consistent with school policy. The participants for this particular Master's Capstone was a convenience sample of just my classroom and it may not be a good representation of Hmong parents in the school or the surrounding area. Future research should extend the reach presented in this study and survey maybe the entire third grade or even the entire school, to produce a much larger sample and range of responses. Another constraint of the study may be that the parents who know me, or know that I will be working with their child for the rest of the school year, may not have answered the survey questions completely honestly, introducing social desirability bias. Social desirability bias refers to the fact that in self-reports, people will often report inaccurately on sensitive topics in order to present themselves in the best possible light (Fisher, 1993). I may have had more unbiased responses if I had given the survey to my parents at a school conference where maybe they would've felt more of an initiative to take the survey honestly and I would have had the chance to explain in person what the survey meant, or clarify questions that they may have had about the survey questions.

Future Research

This capstone has opened my eyes in so many ways. After taking the teaching job at a Hmong-focused charter school, I have learned so much about the culture of my students and the school. I have grown an immense love and respect for the Hmong culture. Going into this capstone, I knew that I wanted to learn more about my students, their families and where they have come from. Although I learned many new things about *the Hmong experience in school*. I would really enjoy to learn more. I feel that having a broader range of participants would give me a clearer picture of how people are experiencing our school. In the future, I

would survey a broader range of students and do it in a way that I would be available to parents with any questions about the survey. In the future, to gain better understanding of survey questions and better survey results, I would give surveys at a school conference or go to students' homes to conduct the surveys or interviews because I believe it would provide rich, qualitative data to analyze.

Personal Growth and Cogitation

Over the course of this capstone, my writing abilities have grown immensely. I went into this process feeling very overwhelmed but with the help and encouragement of so many individuals, I was able to overcome my fears of everything required to write this capstone. I have grown so much that I feel much more capable of conducting future research. This capstone has helped me grow as a teacher and colleague. I have learned the value of patience, going through multiple drafts and seeking help through friends, family, and the writing center. I have found a passion that I have always carried with me to research other cultures of marginalized groups because of my unique background, and slowly, I was able to put it into the pages of this capstone. Lastly, my understanding of the students that I work with and the Hmong culture has deepened over the course of the last year and I have found myself sharing meaningful insight as well as continuing to gain meaningful insight of the Hmong culture. I was able to see, and portray in this capstone, all of the unique families that blend together to make this beautifully diverse portrait of my classroom.

Final Conclusion

This chapter included focal points of this capstone and an overview of the literature review was added along with ramifications and constraints of the capstone, followed by my personal growth writing this capstone. Having the ability to seek out help and witness the personal growth that continues to exist in

my classroom and professional relationships daily has been key to this writing process. I have had the opportunity to access a special desire that I have always carried with me to research diverse groups of people through this capstone and it has inspired me to continue my educational journey as a professional. I have also been inspired through this process to continue to understand the diverse groups of students that occupy our schools today. I have gained a better understanding of my question, *What is the Hmong Experience in school?* I have seen the success of this capstone within my classroom and tapping into individual families and their unique desires for their children in my classroom. I will continue to seek more information about my students and their backgrounds. I truly believe that it is when we seek to know our students beyond their academic abilities and seek to find who they are through their backgrounds that we can access what is needed to help them succeed.

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Appendix A
Parent Permission Letter

Dear Participant,

I invite you to participate in a research study entitled *The Hmong Experience in School*. I am currently enrolled in the Masters of Arts in Teaching Program at Hamline University in Saint Paul, MN, and am in the process of writing my Master's Capstone. The purpose of the research is to determine: Different perspectives of the Hmong experience in school. The enclosed survey has been designed to collect information on: you, the participant.

Your participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You may decline altogether, or leave blank any questions you don't wish to answer. There are no known risks to participation beyond those encountered in everyday life. Your responses will remain confidential and anonymous. No one other than the researcher will know your individual answers to this survey.

If you agree to participate in this project, please answer the questions on the survey as best you can. It should take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. Please return the survey back to school as soon as possible with your child. (Even if you do not want to participate).

If you have any questions about this project, feel free to contact Ms. Buckless, 3rd Grade Teacher at (763) 592-7706 or jbuckless@nobleacademy.us. Information on the rights of human subjects in research is available through the Hamline University Institutional Review Board at 1536 Hewitt Avenue Saint

Paul, MN 55104; website: <https://www.hamline.edu/committees/institutional-review-board/>; (Matthew Olson, chair mholson@hamline.edu.

Please check the box if you would like to; or would not like to participate in this study and send back to school with your child.

I would like to participate in this study I do not want to participate in this study

Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willing to participate.

Signature:

Date: 12/7/2016

Thank you for your assistance in this important endeavor.

Sincerely yours,

Ms. Jessica Buckless

Appendix B

Parent Permission Letter Translated to Hmong

Nyob Zoo,

Kuv thov caw koj los pab kuv txoj kev tshawb fawb muaj lub npe hu ua The Hmong Experience in School. Tam sim no kuv tseem kawm kuv daim Masters of Arts hauv qhov Program Qhia Ntawv nyob hauv Hamline University hauv nroog Saint Paul, MN, thiab tseem sau kuv daim Master's Capstone. Lub hom phiaj ntawm txoj kev tshawb fawb no yog los nrhiav: Txog cov Hmoob txoj kev kawm hauv tsev kawm ntawv. Daim ntawv lus nug uas xa tuaj nrog daim ntawv no yog tsim los tshawb fawb txog: koj txoj kev kawm ntawv.

Koj txoj kev pab tshawb fawb no yog teb cov lus nug hauv daim ntawv, thiab yog kev pab dawb xwb. Koj muaj cai tsis teb los tau, thiab yog tias muaj lo lus nug twg koj tsis xav teb, koj tsis teb los tau. Yuav tsis muaj kev ua teeb meem rau koj thiab tsis muaj leej twg yuav paub txog koj cov lus teb. Tsuas yog cov neeg tshawb fawb thiaj li yuav pom thiab paub cov lus teb hauv daim ntawv lus nug.

Yog koj txaus siab koom txoj kev tshawb fawb no, thov teb cov lus nug hauv daim ntawv lus nug li koj teb tau. Nws yuav siv li 20-30 feeb mam tiav.

Teb tas thov muab rau koj tus menyuam nqa rov tuaj rau tsev kawm ntawv.

(Txawm teb thiab tsis teb los thov xav rov qab tuaj). Yog koj muaj lus nug txog kev tshawb fawb no, hu tau rau Ms. Buckless, tus xib fwb qhia qi 3. Xov tooj yog (763) 592-7706 thiab email yog jbuckless@nobleacademy.us. Ntaub ntawv hais txog koj txoj cai muaj nyob hauv Hamline University Institutional Review Board.

Chaw nyob yog 1536 Hewitt Avenue, Saint Paul, MN 55104; website yog:
<https://www.hamline.edu/committees/institutional-review-board/>; (Matthew
Olson, chair mholson@hamline.edu).

Thov kos lub thawv hauv qab seb koj yuav koom los tsis koom txoj kev
tshawb fawb no, es muab rau koj tus menyuam nqa rov tuaj rau tsev kawm ntawv.

Kuv xav koom txoj kev tshawb fawb no Kuv tsis xav koom txoj kev
tshawb fawb no

Kos npe hauv qab txhais tau tias koj tau nyeem thaib to taub cov ntaub ntawv
saum toj, thiab tias koj txaus siab teb.

Kos Npe:

Hnub Tim:

Ua tsaug koj pab tau txoj kev tshawb fawb no.

Sau Npe,

Ms. Jessica Buckless

Appendix C
Parent Survey

This survey will help me get to know you better and understand your experience in school. It will also serve as data for my college Master's research. It is completely voluntary and confidential. If you would prefer to fill out the survey in Hmong, please fill out the Hmong translated version that is attached.

Please sign the informed consent, complete the survey, and send them both back with your child tomorrow.

1. What is your relationship to the student in Ms. Buckless's third grade class at Noble Academy?

2. What is your gender?

Female Male

3. What is your age group?

18-24 yrs. 25-34 yrs. 35-44 yrs. 45-54 yrs. 55-64 yrs.

65+ yrs.

4. What was your country of birth?

5. If born outside the U.S., how long have you been living in this country?

6. If lived outside the U.S., in what country did you attend school?

7. What is the highest level of school that you have completed? (Check the box that applies to you)

- Primary School
- Some high school, but no diploma.
- High school diploma (or GED)
- Some college, but no degree
- 2-year college degree
- 4-year college degree
- Graduate-level degree
- None of the above

8. My experiences with school in the U.S. has been positive.
(Please check box that applies to you)

- Strongly Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Neither Agree Nor Disagree
- Somewhat Agree
- Strongly Agree

9. What do you like most about U.S. schools?

10. What do you like least about U.S. schools?

11. How many children by age, currently live in your household?

12. How many adults by age, currently live in your household?

13. For my child(ren) attending this school, I feel confident coming in to talk to a teacher or administrator.

- Not comfortable
- Somewhat not comfortable
- Neither comfortable or uncomfortable
- Somewhat comfortable
- Very comfortable

14. Please explain your answer from question 11. "For my child(ren) attending this school, I feel confident coming in to talk to a teacher or administrator."

15. What made you want to choose a Hmong-focused charter school for your child(ren)?

16. How satisfied are you with your current child(ren)'s school experience?

- Not satisfied
 - Somewhat not satisfied
 - Neither satisfied or unsatisfied
 - Somewhat satisfied
 - Very satisfied
-

17. Please explain your answer from question 16, “How satisfied are you with your current child(ren)’s school experience?”

Culturally relevant education is defined as:

A term created by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) to describe “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes.”

18. How important is culturally relevant education to you?

- Not Important
- Somewhat not important
- Neither unimportant nor important
- Somewhat important
- Very important

19. What do you think your child(ren)’s teacher could do to make their classroom culturally relevant?

20. If you could pick one thing that would help your child(ren) be successful in school, what would it be?

21. I would use a translator when I come into my child(ren)'s school.

- Not likely
- Somewhat not likely
- Neither likely or unlikely
- Somewhat likely
- Very likely

Thank you! Ua tsaug!

Appendix D

Parent Survey Translated to Hmong

Niam Txiv Ntawv Lus Nug

Daim ntawv lus nug no yuav pab kuv paub thaib to taub koj txoj kev kawm ntawv. Kuv yuav muab cov lus teb siv los sau kuv daim Master's. Yuav tsis muab rau lwm tus saib thiab pom. Koj muaj cai xav seb koj yuav pab teb los tsis teb, yuav tsis yuam. Yog koj xav teb lus Askiv, thov siv daim lus Askiv uas tuaj nrog.

Thov sau npe ntawm daim ntawv tso cai, teb cov lus hauv qab, thiab muaj koj tus menyuam nqa rov qab tuaj tagkis.

1. Koj txheeb ze li cas ntawm tus menyuam hauv Ms. Buckless hoob peb tom Noble Academy?

2. Koj yog poj niam los txiv neej?

Poj Niam Txiv Neej

3. Koj muaj li puas tsawg xyoo?

18-24 xyoos 25-34 xyoos 35-44 xyoos 45-54 xyoos

55-64 xyoos 65+ xyoos

4. Koj yug teb chaws twg?

5. Yog yug lwm lub teb chaws, uas li koj tuaj nyob teb chaws Miskas tau ntev npaum cas?

6. Yog koj tau nyob lwm lub teb chaws, koj kawm ntawv nyob teb chaws twg?

7. Koj kawm tias qib siab npaum li cas? (Kos lub thawv uas koj tau kawm tiav)

- Tsev Kawm Ntawv Qis (Qib K-8)
- Tsev Kawm Ntawv Siab (Qib 9-12), tiamsis tsis muaj Diploma.
- Tsev Kawm Ntawv Siab (Qib 9-12), muaj Diploma los yog GED
- Tsev Kawm Ntawv Qib Siab, tiamsis tsis muaj Degree
- Tsev Kawm Ntawv Qib Siab (College) 2-Xyoos
- Tsev Kawm Ntawv Qib Siab (College) 4-Xyoos
- Tsev Kawm Ntawv Graduate Degree
- Tsis Tau Kawm

8. Kuv txoj kev kawm ntawv nyob teb chaws Miskas zoo heev.
(Kos seb koj pom zoo npaum cas)

- Tsis Pom Zoo Heev
- Tsis Pom Zoo Me Ntsis
- Nyob Nruab Nrab
- Pom Zoo Me Ntsis
- Pom Zoo Heev

9. Koj nyiam dab tsis tshaj hais txog cov tsev kawm ntawv nyob teb chaws Miskas?

10. Koj nyiam dab tsis tsawg tshaj hais txog cov tsev kawm ntawv nyob teb chaws Miskas?

11. Puas tsawg tus menyuam nyob nrog koj? Sau lawd cov xyoo thiab.

12. Puas tsawg tus neeg laus nyob nrog koj? Sau lawd cov xyoo thiab.

13. Kuv xis tuaj nrog cov xib fwb thiab cov neeg ua huaj lwm tom tsev kawm ntawv tam txog kuv tus menyuam.

- Tsis Xis
- Tsis Xis Me Ntsis
- Nyob Hauv Nruab Nrab
- Xis Me Ntsis
- Xis

14. Thov sau ntiv hais txog koj lo lus teb rau lo lus nug 13 " Kuv xis tuaj nrog cov xib fwb thiab cov neeg ua huaj lwm tom tsev kawm ntawv tam txog kuv tus

menyuam."

15. Vim li cas koj xaiv tsev kawm ntawv Charter Hmoob rau koj tus/cov
menyuam?

16. Koj txaus siab npaum li cas hais txog koj tus menyuam kev kawm ntawv tam
sim nov?

- Tsis Txaus Siab
- Tsis Txaus Siab Me Ntsis
- Nyob Hauv Nruab Nrab
- Txaus Siab Me Ntsis
- Txaus Siab Heev

17. Thov sau ntxiv hais txog koj lo lus teb rau lo lus nug 16 " Koj txaus siab
npaum li cas hais txog koj tus menyuam kev kawm ntawv tam sim nov?"

Culturally relevant education txhais tau tias:

Ib lo lus tsim los ntawm Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994). Cultural relevant education yog txoj kev kawm uas cov xib fwb siv ib haiv neeg kab lis kev cai los mus pab qhia ntawv, xws li kev txawj ntse, tswv yim, kev xav, thiab cwj pwm.

18. Yog li no, cultural relevant education tseem ceeb npaum li cas rau koj?

- Tsis Tseem Ceeb
- Tsis Tseem Ceeb Me Tsis
- Nyob Hauv Nruab Nrab
- Tseem Ceeb Me Tsis
- Tseem Ceeb Heev

19. Koj xav tias koj tus menyuam tus xib fwb yuav tsum ua dab tsi es thiaj li siv tau kab lis kev cai los mus qhia ntawv?

20. Yog koj xaiv tau ib yam uas yuav pab tau koj tus menyuam kawm tau ntawv, yam ntawd yog dab tsi?

21. Kuv yuav siv ib tug neeg txhais lus thaum koj tuaj tom kuv tus menyuam lub tsev kawm ntawv.

- Yuav Tsis Siv
- Yuav Tsis Siv Me Ntsis
- Nyob Hauv Nruab Nrab
- Yuav Siv Me Ntsis
- Yuav Siv Heev

Thank you! Ua tsaug!