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PERCEPTIONS OF LOW SES, HIGH ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT VIETNAMESE
MIDDLE GRADES STUDENTS OF FACTORS THAT HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO
THEIR SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
The Department of Special Education and Habilitative Services

by

Judith A. Scott

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May, 2005

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The understanding and confidence in my abilities of my husband Bill, as well as the encouragement of family members and of friends sustained me throughout the research and writing of this document. Without them, the successful completion of this project would have been impossible. I thank them for their support and acknowledge their contributions with gratitude.

The members of my committee, Dr. Mary Banbury, Dr. Bud Wellington, Dr. Linda Flynn-Wilson, Dr. Charles Gifford, and Dr. Teresa Christensen, each made contributions to my doctoral program and to my dissertation. I wish to especially acknowledge the persistence of my committee co-chairs, Drs. Banbury and Wellington, in seeing me through this process. In addition, special thanks must go to Dr. Marydee Spillett for her guidance in methodological matters.

Special thanks, also, to Father Michael Nguyen, Mrs. Mary Nguyen of Versailles Headstart, and the student and family parishioners of Our Lady Queen of Vietnam. They are the heart and soul of this undertaking, and it is my ardent hope that any insight they may glean from this study will prove as valuable to them as it was to me. Since any work of this magnitude inevitably depends not only on those whose contributions can be directly acknowledged, but on countless others who provide aid, I offer my most sincere gratitude for all the assistance that I have received while completing my dissertation and regret that I cannot acknowledge each person individually.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the perceptions of low socioeconomic status, high academic achievement Vietnamese American middle grades students in the Vietnamese community with respect to the roles that their parents and community play in supporting academic achievement. Previous research has established the positive relationships between parent involvement and student achievement, and between high SES and student achievement. However this study explores the perceptions of high achieving middle grades students with low SES. Through focus group discussions and interviews, this study examines student achievement within the theoretical framework of social capital.

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

Overview of the Study

E pluribus unum: “Out of many, one.” I believe that the challenge to American educators for the 21st century remains much the same as it has been since the time of Horace Mann: A place must be found where the *pluribus* can gather as equals, where diverse traditions are respected, and where the *unum* can acknowledge conflict, yet strive for peace. Schools must be such a place (Hones & Cha, 1999, p. 27).

This chapter discusses immigrants coming to the United States and the evolving nature of both the immigrants and their expectations as new Americans. Multiculturalism is discussed, as well as the key concepts of parent involvement and student achievement. This chapter introduces the theoretical framework for the study, social capital. In addition, the need for the study and the purpose of the study are discussed. This chapter includes the definition of terms pertinent to the study, and concludes with a summary of the chapter.

Immigrants

The United States is a country of immigrants: some newly arrived, some less recently arrived, and some the descendants of people who immigrated decades ago. Historically, the United States has welcomed people seeking asylum from religious and political persecution, as well as those prompted by economic opportunity. The

immigrants who came to the United States in the early years of building the population base tended to be of European origin.

In the tradition of the “great melting pot,” the newly arrived immigrants were strongly encouraged to embrace their new country by taking steps to insure assimilation, such as learning to speak and write English, and enrolling their children in public schools where English was the dominant, if not only, language spoken. Schools were commonly thought of, at the beginning of the twentieth century, as “a means for homogenizing or eliminating differences within the population, thus ensuring that the large numbers of immigrants coming to the United States from Europe . . . would assimilate to the customs and behaviors of those already in place” (LaBelle & Ward, 1994, p. 3).

As the America to which immigrants came has evolved over time, so too has the way that researchers have written about them (Plummer, 1994). The “melting pot” is now described as less of a puree of individuals and cultures and more as a “stew” (Engley, 1999).

Takaki (1998) speaks of the more recent waves of immigrants as strangers arriving from a “different shore . . . coming from Asia across the Pacific rather than from Europe across the Atlantic” (p. 13). Because of a shift away from Europe to a more diverse array of countries of origin, the influx of immigrants in the latter part of the twentieth century and the beginning of this century has literally changed the complexion of the American populace (Engley, 1999). Other researchers (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1983) note that “Indochinese refugees, principally Vietnamese, have added a new thread to the rich tapestry of American society” (p. 107). In general, the population looks different than it did a quarter of a century ago.

The model for accepting and embracing immigrants has also changed. Immigrants in the last century were expected to assimilate into the dominant culture. However, the assumption is no longer made that the immigrants will automatically assimilate (LaBelle & Ward, 1994).

Not only have America's expectations for its immigrants changed, but the expectations of the immigrants have also changed with regard to assimilation. To reflect the changing nature of the process of incorporating newcomers into United States, some researchers have abandoned the melting pot image altogether, instead referring to "ethnic stratification" (Zhou & Bankston III, 1998, p. 235). Researchers (Kelly & Schaufli, 1996; Rumbaut, 1996) are seeking different metaphors to describe the assimilation process for immigrants, wherein each successive arrival of immigrants is represented as a discrete layer of the society, thus becoming part of the whole while maintaining their own strata of identity and unique characteristics. One recent group of immigrants, the Vietnamese, has captured the interest of researchers (Kibria, 1993; Silka & Tip, 1994; Zhou, 1997) both because of their significant numbers, as well as the ways in which they have maintained their particular strata of ethnic identity.

Vietnamese Immigrants

These Vietnamese immigrants who began arriving in the United States in 1975 were "driven by the circumstances and powerful forces of war" (Takaki, 1998, p. 471). In addition to being immigrants, the Vietnamese could also be characterized as refugees. Unlike the immigrants who came to the United States through New York's Ellis Island between 1890 and 1933 (Brownstone, Franck, & Brownstone, 2000), who could choose where they would resettle, the Vietnamese immigrants were placed in resettlement

locations determined by agencies of the U.S. government. In fact, the purposeful resettlement of the Vietnamese immigrants which scattered these Southeast Asian refugees was designed to “minimize the impact of resettlement on local communities” (Zhou & Bankston III, 2000a, p. 19). Later, as the immigration and resettlement processes continued, the Vietnamese immigrants began to congregate in geographic locations of their own choosing and build ethnic communities where none had existed before, thereby strengthening Vietnamese ethnicities (Zhou & Bankston III, 2000a). These communities also provided a context for reconstituting families that had been fragmented by war (Desbarats, 1985). Within these communities, families reassembled, “incorporating traditional values, communal solidarities, and refugee experiences into a lifestyle adapted to American ways” (Caplan, Choy, & Whitmore, 1992). Researchers (Caplan et al., 1992) found that among the traditional, culture-based values that were part of the fabric of these new communities was the parental expectation of educational attainment and high academic achievement for their children. While there was support from within the family and ethnic community for academic achievement, these immigrant children often entered school environments where they were clearly not members of the dominant culture, and where their culturally embedded values potentially put them at odds with students and norms from the dominant culture (Cline & Schwartz, 1999; Zhou & Bankston III, 1998). Cultural diversity and its inherent value were not necessarily appreciated, as a concept, when the first Vietnamese immigrants arrived in the United States. Multiculturalism was the movement that supported the growing awareness and appreciation of cultural diversity and cultural norms outside those of the dominant culture.

Multiculturalism

The process of recognizing and nurturing the diversity in our schools has evolved over time in the United States. In the nineteenth century, schools were used to socialize children from a variety of ethnic groups (Labelle and Ward, 1994).

At the onset of World War I, American education tended to represent only one, unified culture. Asserting ethnic identity outside the dominant culture was equated with being un-American. Patriotism and Americanism became synonymous, and there was little tolerance of ethnic diversity in the hysteria that accompanied World War I. As a result, the curriculum, too, became less diverse, as evidenced by dropping foreign languages such as German from the courses offered in American schools.

Subsequently, another trend influenced changes in education. Along with the rise of fascism in the late 1930s and 1940s, intercultural education, the first well-defined educational approach to intergroup relations, was initiated (Gay, 2000; Gregory, 1997; Nieto, 2003).

Intercultural education was presented to the classroom teacher of the 1940s and 1950s as a means to save cultural resources, portraying ethnic contributions as kinds of 'endangered species' to be introduced in the classroom and passed on to more children, lest these species become extinct. While intercultural education supported diversity to a degree, it appears essentially to have been assimilationist (LaBelle and Ward, 1994, p. 19).

More importantly, intercultural education was instrumental in setting the stage for its successors, multiethnic and multicultural education.

The 1960s and 1970s saw dramatic change in intergroup relations. Several

indicators of these changes were the civil rights movement, a rise in ethnic consciousness, and a more critical analysis of textbooks and other materials (LaBelle & Ward, 1994). The multiethnic education approach integrated into the curriculum the contributions of various ethnic groups (Banks, 1981). Multiethnic education gradually evolved into multicultural education.

Researchers (LaBelle & Ward, 1994) note that the multicultural education approach was “also promoted by an analysis of curriculum materials. Subordinate group parents and community members found that their children’s education in general . . . conveyed distortions and inaccuracies about their history and heritage” (p. 23). As a result, more effort was made by the nation’s educational system to develop curricula that were inclusive and reflective of diversity. The concept of multicultural education has evolved, and continues to evolve.

Glazer (1997) broadened the definition of multicultural education to include groups other than ethnic groups, such as women, people who are gay, people with special education needs and people of various age groups. Banks (1997), on the other hand, was concerned with multiethnic education and intergroup relations in regard to the relationship of ethnic groups in schools. Other educators (Grant & Sleeter, 1985) perceived multicultural education as a platform for a reform movement that empowers students and potentially changes schools and society. They detail a comprehensive, five-part typology of multicultural education programs which include the following categories: (a) teaching the culturally different, (b) human relations, (c) single group studies, (d) multicultural education and (e) education that is multicultural and social reconstructionist. Labelle & Ward (1994) characterize multicultural education in the

United States as a “field . . . which possesses a literature long on advocacy but short on research” (p. 26).

The concept of multicultural education has evolved over time in the United States as internal and world forces have impacted the educational system. Based on Labelle & Ward (1994), further exploration of this topic through research efforts seems to be warranted, considering the advocacy-rich and research-poor body of literature. Multicultural education is a multi-faceted concept, which, for proper exploration, must also include discussions about parent involvement and another key factor, student achievement.

Parent Involvement and Student Achievement

A substantive body of research asserts a positive relationship between student achievement and parent involvement (Clark, 1983; Comer, 1989; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Herman & Yeh, 1983; Schneider & Lee, 1990). A conceptual framework for parent involvement was explored by Cervone and O’Leary (1982), providing one of the earliest paradigms to describe the ways in which parent involvement may be manifested. Comer, Haynes & Joyner (1996) and Epstein (1995) are the researchers who have most recently and frequently articulated the nature of parent involvement and the dynamic among schools, families, and communities which supports student success.

Reinforcing the research that positively associates student achievement and parent involvement in support of education, recent federal legislation, Education of the Handicapped Act Amendment, Public Law 99-457 (U.S. Congress, 1998), Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, also known as IDEA (U.S. Congress, 1990), and

GOALS 2000 (U.S. Congress, 1994) have encouraged parent involvement. In particular, GOALS 2000 has specified objectives pertaining to parent involvement, recognizing the need

...for increasing partnerships that respond to the varying needs of parents and the home, including parents of children who are disadvantaged or bilingual, or parents of children with disabilities . . . every school will actively engage parents and families in a partnership which supports the academic work of children (Section 102, ¶ 8).

Further, this legislation highlights the importance of competence in understanding and appropriately responding to and encouraging parent involvement as it manifests in different cultures.

While research has been conducted on parent involvement for general student populations, less is known about the nature of parent involvement for culturally diverse populations of exceptional students. Al Hassan & Gardner (2002) explored strategies to involve immigrant parents of children with disabilities, such as including translators in parent meetings, giving the parents an opportunity to choose a translator with whom they feel comfortable, providing classes to teach parents English as a second language, and making school reports simple by either using icons (e.g. happy or sad faces) or having them translated into the family's native language. Earlier, Kaplan (2001) and Kloosterman (1997) acknowledged the need to close the gap between the needs of and the educational services provided to gifted English Language Learners (ELLs), using the metaphor of bridge building. They found that part of the gap that exists between services provided and actual needs may be attributable to the lack of awareness or failure on the

part of school persons to acknowledge the unique cultural factors that influence children who are not members of the dominant culture. Their research showed that familial patterns, inclusive of the manner in which immigrant parents are involved with their children's education, need further exploration.

Mere acknowledgment of research and federal mandates declaring the requirement for establishment and nurturance of parent involvement programs for high achieving exceptional children is not adequate. School communities must become more cognizant of paradigms for developing new and enhancing existing avenues for parental involvement (Comer, Haynes, & Joyner, 1996; Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, & Simon, 1997). In the culturally diverse school settings common to many urban areas, educators must become more attuned to the forms and nuances that parent involvement assumes when it arises from recent immigrant families. This study explores the nature of social capital as evidenced by parent involvement for one group of immigrant parents, Vietnamese, and makes that information available to educators to enhance their practice and interaction with parents from a non-dominant culture.

Theoretical Framework

Social capital, the theoretical framework that informs this study, has its roots both in classical capital and neo-capital theories, as well as the discipline of sociology. Lin (2001) states that "to understand social capital, we must first clarify the notion of capital" (p. 4). He begins the clarification process by delving into classical capital theory, also known as Marxian capital theory. In this exploration, Lin traces the notion of capital to Karl Marx (Marx, 1995), who provided an analysis of how capital emerges from social relations between capitalists and laborers in the processes of commodity production. In

the classical theory of capital, both investment and profit are vested in the capitalists. However, within the last four decades, capital theory has evolved into what Lin (2001) refers to as the “neo-capital theory.” Neo-capital theory eliminates the class explanation, and provides alternative iterations of capital, including human capital, cultural capital, and social capital (Lin, 2001, p. 8). The gradual evolution of the capital theory, progressing away from classical capital theory toward neo-capital theory established the climate that allowed capital theory to slide from the realm of economics into the realm of sociology. In turn, the broad implications of social capital theory made it readily importable from sociology into other venues.

The genesis of social capital theory as it relates to sociology lies in the work of Pierre Bourdieu wherein social capital is defined as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutional relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248). Dekker & Uslaner (2001) also address the meaning of social capital, indicating that “social capital is all about the value of social networks, bonding similar people and bridging between diverse people, with norms of reciprocity . . . [it is] fundamentally about how people interact with each other” (p. 3).

According to Portes (1998) “the concept of social capital has become one of the most popular exports from sociological theory into everyday language” (p. 2). This lateral importation of the concept of social capital from the earlier work of Pierre Bourdieu is a reflection of its utility and applicability to numerous settings, including education and specifically, the education of immigrant populations. Researchers (Dika & Singh, 2002) note that “social capital did not travel far in its journey to

education” (p. 34).

In recent research, Portes (1998) identified three basic functions of social capital in a variety of contexts: (a) as a source of social control, (b) as a source of family support, and (c) as a source of benefits through extrafamilial networks. In addition, he specifically differentiates among the various kinds of capital, indicating that

. . .whereas economic capital is in people’s bank accounts and human capital is inside their heads, social capital inheres in the structure of their relationships. To possess social capital, a person must be related to others, and it is those others, not himself, who are the actual source of his or her advantage (p.7).

Coleman (1988) discusses the relationships between student achievement and social capital, which he identifies as a key component of family background.

Ordinarily, in the examination of the effects of various factors on achievement in school, “family background” is considered a single entity, distinguished from schooling in its effects. But there is not merely a single “family background”; family background is analytically separable into at least three different components: financial capital, human capital, and social capital (p. S109).

Further, he defines the other components of family background . "Financial capital is approximately measured by the family wealth or income. It provides the physical place in the home for studying, materials to aid learning, the financial resources that smooth family problems" (p. S109). "Human capital is approximately measured by parents' education and provides the potential for a cognitive environment for the child that aids learning" (p. S109).

Lin (2001) adds another dimension to the discussion of human capital by positing

that individuals can acquire human capital not only by gaining education, but also by acquiring on-the-job training or work experiences, by remaining physically healthy and able, and by migrating to places where demands are higher for their labor (p. 12).

While there appears to be a clear consensus of what constitutes the first component of family background, financial capital (Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2001; Portes, 1998), there is less agreement about what constitutes the second component, human capital, as evidenced by Lin's (2001) assertion that it is more encompassing than Coleman's concept of human capital, which included just the formal education of parents. Further, there is even less agreement regarding the nature of social capital, the third component of family background. Recent researchers (Horvat et al., 2003) have acknowledged this lack of accord on the concept of social capital, noting that their approach to the concept of social capital would be couched in terms of the "emergent consensus" (p. 323). They concur with other researchers that the concept must be taken to refer to the material and immaterial resources that individuals and families are able to access through their social ties (Lin, 2001; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

Portes' (1998) acknowledgment that one of the functions of social capital is "as a source of family support" is affirmed and further brought into focus by Zhou and Bankston (1996) in their study of the Vietnamese community of New Orleans. They claim that "both parents and children are constantly observed as under a 'Vietnamese microscope.' If a child flunks out of school . . . he or she brings shame not only to himself or herself, but also to the family" (p. 207). This is an example of social capital as described by Coleman (1988), wherein it is the family's responsibility to adopt certain norms to advance children's life chances. When the family exerts pressure on the child to

perform to bring recognition to themselves and to the family, they are invoking social capital as a positive form of social control.

Using the sociological concept of social capital as a theoretical framework, this study examined student perceptions of the roles that parents play with respect to their children's learning, as a direct manifestation of social capital and its relationship to student achievement for Vietnamese middle grades (5-8) students.

Need for the Study

Student achievement and the factors which contribute to it have been explored extensively and from multiple perspectives (Alexander & Entwisle, 1996; Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987; Phillips & Zimmerman, 1990).

Socioeconomic Status (SES) has been identified as a major factor in student achievement, generally summarized as the higher the parents' SES, the greater the likelihood of positive student outcomes (Alexander & Entwisle, 1996; Bierman, 1996). Parent involvement has also been identified as a major factor in student achievement (Clark, 1983; Coleman, 1987; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Herman & Yeh, 1983).

Traditional, school-related models for parent involvement, such as adult sponsored activities like Parent Teacher Associations or Organizations (PTAs/PTOs) have long been considered typical manifestations of parent investment in the educational process and in the success of children (Bierman, 1996; Brandt, 1989; Epstein, 1994; Herman & Yeh, 1983; Schneider & Lee, 1990; Stevenson & Baker, 1987). However, among immigrant parent populations, parent involvement may be manifested in non-traditional activities (Lopez, 2001). Lopez describes how an immigrant family

understood involvement as a means of instilling in their children the value of education through the medium of hard work, and viewed taking their children to work as a form of involvement. In this context, they were teaching their children “real-life” lessons.

The achievement of various subpopulations, particularly Vietnamese, has also been examined (Sue & Okazaki, 1990), wherein Asian students (Alva, 1993; Pang, 1995) are frequently referred to as the “model minority.” Kao (1995) and Lee (2001) however, recognized that not all Vietnamese students are members of the “model minority,” sometimes yielding to pressure to conform to peer, rather than ethnic community behavioral norms. Despite substantial research, questions still remain about the factors which contribute significantly to academic success or failure for Asian American students (Sue & Okazaki, 1990).

Examining the process of parent investment through educational involvement, Coleman (1988) notes that "Social capital within the family that gives the child access to the adult's human capital depends both on the physical presence of adults in the family and on the attention given by the adults to the child” (p. S111). In the case of Vietnamese students in high schools, Zhou & Bankston (1996) posit that the social capital invested by the parents of the students is a major factor in determining academic success.

A review of the literature suggests the need for more research that addresses the relationship between student achievement and parent involvement for students from the non-dominant culture and the nature of that parent involvement.

Purpose of the Study

This study contributes to the knowledge base pertaining to the relationship between student achievement and parent involvement for low SES, high academic

achievement middle grades students of Vietnamese origin in urban public schools. The study explores the perceptions of these students with regard to the role that their parents have played in the students' attainment of academic goals. This study focuses on one population: Vietnamese American middle grades students in grades five through eight, who are achieving academic success, but have low SES. All of these students are served in a single urban school system in Louisiana. All participants live in the same community, situated within the larger urban setting and come from similar socioeconomic backgrounds.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are provided to specify the meanings of important terms in this study:

Academically High Achieving Student is defined as one who is succeeding academically in school, as measured by cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA) of 3.0 or greater, or standardized achievement test scores at or above the fifth stanine.

Culture is defined as social heritage, or tradition, that is passed on to future generations (Bodley, 1994).

Financial Capital is defined, for the purposes of this study, as money available in the household for buying material goods that the children need for their proper development (Gonzalez, 2002).

Human Capital is defined as the nonmaterial resources that parents can provide for their children, as measured by parents' educational level (Entwisle & Astone, 1994).

Middle Grade Students is defined as students who are enrolled in grades five through eight.

Parent is defined as an adult who may or may not be the biological parent of the student, but resides in the home with a student and functions as the legal guardian of the student.

Parent Involvement is defined as the dedication of resources within a given domain by the parent to the child. Domains may include the home, school, or community. This definition recognizes that there is a difference between parents' overall involvement with the child and involvement in the child's education (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994). Therefore, it may include parent attitudes about their child's school, parent participation in all types of school activities, parent volunteering at and communicating with the school, and parent participation in learning activities at home and in the community.

Social Capital is defined as a component of family background, when taken in the educational context of examining student achievement. Social capital exists in the relationships among people. It may be manifested as parent involvement in promoting student achievement (Coleman, 1988).

Low Socioeconomic Status (SES) is defined as a family income level that results in a student's being eligible for free and/or reduced lunch in the National School Lunch Program (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003).

Student Achievement is defined as school attainment, as measured by the attainment of a specific Grade Point Average (GPA), and standardized test scores. High academic student achievement, for the purposes of this study, is defined as a GPA of 3.0 or higher, or standardized test scores at or above the fifth stanine on a norm referenced test.

Vietnamese American Student is one who self identifies as being part of the

Vietnamese culture and who either has parents who arrived after 1975 or who themselves did so.

Summary

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the study. This chapter briefly describes the immigrant experience and the changing nature of that experience as immigrants come from a widening spectrum of countries to become Americans. This chapter describes multiculturalism, highlighting the history of education in the United States as it relates to immigrant student populations and the expectation of assimilation into American culture. It describes changing newcomer expectations, as they evolved to embrace a more multicultural than monocultural process. The chapter describes parent involvement and links it to student achievement. It presents the theoretical framework for this study, social capital, and delineates the need for and purpose of the study. Additionally, it defines terms important to the conduct of this research.

Chapter 2 presents a conceptual context for the research. This chapter describes my developing personal interest in the research through a general chronology of professional experiences, as well as a more particular chronology of my experiences with high academic ability, low socioeconomic status Vietnamese students. Factors in student achievement, Asian Americans, and in particular, the immigration experiences of Vietnamese Americans are described in this chapter. This chapter describes the theoretical framework for this study, social capital. Major topics in this chapter include parent involvement placed in an historical perspective, and the construct of parent involvement within the context of various conceptual frameworks. Further, this chapter describes multiple factors that influence parent involvement. This chapter describes the

research question for this research project.

Chapter 3 describes the study's conceptual context, exploring research design, the research question, and research relationships with participants and establishing rapport with them. This chapter describes sampling and data collection, including a discussion of the focus group and individual interview process, tape recording, note-taking, and the interview guides. This chapter describes data analysis, and the related components of data reduction, data displays, and drawing and verifying conclusions. This chapter describes trustworthiness issues and strategies with which to analyze for trustworthiness.

Chapter 4 describes the participants, the research process inclusive of obtaining parental permission, selection of study participants, and collecting background information. It describes emergent themes including expectations, culture, family, and community. The discussion of expectations encompasses parent and peer expectations, and community influences. The culture theme includes preservation of culturally based expectations, contrasts between Vietnamese and other cultures, and cultural celebrations. Family, as a theme, embodies family composition, family power, family roles, family structure, and family support. The community theme includes religious and secular communities, community environment, community members, and after school in the community.

Chapter 5 includes a review of the purpose of the study, methods and procedures, presentation of findings, summary of findings, theoretical framework, implications for future research, and implications for practice.

CHAPTER 2 – CONCEPTUAL CONTEXT

Overview

This chapter describes my developing personal interest in this research through a general chronology of professional experiences, as well as a more particular chronology of my experiences with high academic ability, low socioeconomic status Vietnamese students. It also explains the theoretical framework for this study, social capital. Major topics in this chapter include parent involvement placed in an historical perspective, and the construct of parent involvement within the context of various conceptual frameworks. Further, this chapter describes multiple factors that influence parent involvement. Finally, this chapter presents the research question for this research project.

Personal Interest

My interest in the high academically achieving Vietnamese student population arises from my awareness as a researcher that student achievement has been strongly associated with high socioeconomic status (Alexander & Entwisle, 1996; Bierman, 1996). However, among the Vietnamese students I have encountered in the public school setting, many can be characterized as relatively low SES, but high academic achievement students. Not only is this my perception, but it is also a perception shared by others. Researchers (Alva, 1993; Kao, 1995; Lee, 2001) have noted the extraordinary achievement of students sharing similar economic backgrounds. In fact, some researchers have characterized the educational achievement of Asian Americans as “a phenomenon in search of an explanation” (Sue & Okazaki, 1990, p. 913). As I spoke

with these students across a range of schools and ages, I began to wonder what the factors were that supported the typically high levels of academic achievement despite the low economic status of their families.

Chronology of Professional Experiences

Across several decades, I have taught a wide spectrum of learners. I began, immediately out of my undergraduate college experience, teaching middle and high school students in Appalachia in a public school system. These were mixed-ability students, typically with low SES status. Many of the students had no expectation of completing high school, and were not particularly encouraged by their parents to complete the public school educational program.

My next instructional setting was quite different. My teaching involved basic reading instruction for juvenile offenders, ages 16-22, in a minimum-security detention center. Most of the students were from low SES families living in highly urbanized settings, often the barrios of Los Angeles. They were frequently multi-lingual, but could read little, if any, of the languages they spoke. Although they were generally motivated to learn to read, they had little sense of self-efficacy. When asked what they thought the next step in their lives might be, many of the students responded that it would be to move to a higher security prison.

Experience with High Academic Ability Students

Later, I began teaching in a secular private school in the urban South. The students in this school were grouped by academic ability, and I taught the academically accelerated, high ability students, ranging from grades four to eight. I instructed fourth and sixth graders in core curriculum subjects, while teaching language arts in grades

seven and eight. This was a culturally diverse school, and my classes reflected this diversity. While many of my students were native born Americans, generations removed from the immigration process, a nearly equal number were first generation immigrants to this country, having origins in the Middle East, Japan, China, and India. It was with these students that I first became aware of the high parent expectations for Asian children. Many of the parents were highly educated professionals. The immigrant parents were frequently researchers and physicians who had been drawn to the United States to complete advanced degrees or residencies in their profession. From visits to the homes of my students, I deduced that the families could generally be characterized as high SES.

My most recent experience in public education has been with academically gifted students, both in urban and suburban settings in the South. These populations of students could be described as culturally diverse, including students of European origin, as well as African and Asian descent. What distinguished this experience from my earlier private school experience was that virtually all of the urban students could be classified as low SES, as defined by eligibility for free or reduced lunch.

Vietnamese Students

In the process of obtaining specialized training to teach academically gifted students, I had become a more consistent and sophisticated consumer of educational research. In this phase of my education, I became aware of the positive correlation between student achievement and SES. For some of my students, this model seemed to apply; for others, particularly the Vietnamese students, it did not. Despite low SES, my Vietnamese students typically had high grades as reflected in strong grade point averages,

good standardized test scores, and a strong tradition of high school completion and continuance of their education in a university setting.

I reviewed various models for parent involvement, including those by Comer, Epstein, and Pugh. I was striving to find one of the researchers to articulate and perhaps describe the phenomenon that I thought I had observed operating with my Vietnamese students to support learning despite limited financial resources. In the course of this review, I realized that this population is unique. Furthermore, the ways in which parent involvement seemed to be manifested, or sometimes failed to materialize at all in a form recognizable to traditional, American educators, led me to believe that these students and their families did not comfortably fit into the paradigms that had been created by American researchers. It raised the question of whether the dynamic in their ethnic community was so different from the dominant culture family dynamics, with regard to education, that it merited further exploration.

My interactions with Vietnamese high school students in a proximate school district further piqued my interest. Outside the context of my gifted classes, I often found the Vietnamese students to be focused on achievement. Informal conversations with general education Vietnamese high school students led me to wonder about their impetus for achievement. In one particular exchange, a Vietnamese student sought me out during lunch, saying that he was “working hard to be more gifted.” He seemed to equate being gifted with success at school, and thought if he could just be in the gifted classes, he would have better grades. When we talked further, he indicated that his parents wanted him to “do good” in high school so that he could get scholarships and attend college.

In a later discussion with an elementary teacher of the gifted, I learned the story of a gifted student who was conflicted between her biological parents' dreams for her and her own needs. Her teacher told me about her, a newly arrived Vietnamese sixth grade student who was having a difficult time at school, appearing to be depressed and weepy. She was having trouble fitting in with the rest of the girls in her fourth grade class.

The student's situation became clearer in a few days. It seems that her parents, who remained in Vietnam, had spent all of the family's money to send her to the United States to study and live with her aunt. The problem was that there was an age limitation of ten for sending unaccompanied children to the U.S. under this particular immigration program. On all of her immigration documents, the girl had been identified as aged ten, but her real chronological age was nearly sixteen. She was having a difficult time trying to maintain the ruse of being a preadolescent girl, instead of a nearly mature woman.

The fact that the parents were willing to risk all of their financial assets to insure that their daughter would be educated in the United States made me wonder what they wouldn't have done to support her educational process.

I wanted to discover what these Vietnamese American students' perceptions were of the roles that their parents play in supporting their academic achievement, and overall, in achieving positive outcomes in the educational setting. By conducting focus group discussions and interviewing individual students, I hoped to gain insight into the dynamic between these students and their families as it related to the students' learning. I anticipated that, through focus groups and interviews, I would garner a better understanding of the students' perceptions of the factors that influenced their academic achievement.

Factors in Student Academic Achievement

Researchers in the field of education have explored, and continue to explore, the factors that contribute to student achievement (Bempechat, 1999; Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999). Parent involvement has been acknowledged as a significant contributor to positive student academic achievement (Clark, 1983). Eccles & Harold (1993) indicate that “researchers have begun to look at the role schools might play in facilitating parents’ positive role in children’s academic achievement” (p. 568). Although there has been increasing interest in and pressure to increase the level of parent involvement, Burch (1993) says that “rather than the end goal, effective family-school-community partnerships is in itself a critical strategy for increasing the academic and social success for all students” (p. 11).

Asian Americans

Some researchers (Wong, Lai, Nagasawa, & Lin, 1998) observe that for decades “both the media and the general public have perceived Asian Americans as a model minority on the basis of their academic achievement” (p. 95). Not only is there a perception that Asian Americans are strong in the area of academic achievement; but there is also the perception that they are outperforming the European American students. In fact, in a recent poll (Rose & Gallup, 2003) respondents indicated that they believed that parent involvement was an important factor contributing to the academic performance gap between European American students and Asian American students. The “model minority” label has become stereotypical for Asians living in the United States today. This was not always true, however. Lee (1996) notes “stereotypes of

Asians in the United States shift in substance as the vectors of race relations shift. Once labeled by non-Asians as ‘inscrutable’ and ‘wily,’ Asians are now termed ‘the model minority’” (p. 52). In any case, stereotypes are a form of generality, whether negative or positive, and according to folk wisdom, “all generalities are false.” There has been a tendency in both popular culture and in earlier research (Alva, 1993) to group all Asians together, failing to acknowledge different regions or countries of origin. At the same time that some Asians acknowledge that they have a “panethnic/pan-Asian identity,” many also have a strong identity based on their particular country of origin (Lee, 1996; Lee, 2001). The Vietnamese refugees who immigrated to the United States from Southeast Asian from 1975 to the 1990s are one such group.

Vietnamese Americans

The Vietnamese who came to the United States were fleeing a war-ravaged country and the aftermath of war (Takaki, 1998). The first Vietnamese immigrants had little or no time to prepare for their departure. In many cases, the ability to leave quickly and quietly marked the difference between life and death (Igoa, 1995). There are far reaching implications stemming from these hasty departures. Immigrants frequently had no possessions except the clothes they were wearing. There was no provision for emigrating with family members. Further, there was no opportunity to learn the language or the culture of the country to which they were emigrating.

Vietnamese immigrants arriving in the United States had little autonomy. The government determined where they would be settled. In many cases, the Vietnamese were settled in economically depressed areas where housing was readily available and relatively inexpensive (Zhou & Bankston, 1996). The community that surrounded the

research sites for this study is an example of this phenomenon. More positively, however, this community is embedded in a larger urban area that is, and historically has been, culturally and ethnically diverse. In fact, at about the time that the first Vietnamese immigrants were arriving in this community, a local university sponsored a forum to explore the ethnic cultures which contributed to the cultural diversity of the larger metropolitan area (Cooke, 1978). Subsequently, researchers (DeCaro, 2000) wove these more recent Vietnamese arrivals to this urban area into the already rich ethnic and cultural fabric of the larger society and described their “segmented assimilation” into the community (Zhou & Bankston III, 2000a). Although these immigrants added to the richness of the human tapestry, they typically did not bring traditional financial capital with them. Whatever capital they brought with them was less tangible, and to be manifested in the relationships they would eventually build.

Social Capital

The origins of social capital theory reside in the introduction of the concept by Pierre Bourdieu, wherein social capital is defined as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutional relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition”(Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248). In other words, in the context of this study, social capital resides in relationships which, when exercised by individuals, have the potential to accrue benefits to participants in this social network. The exercise of these relationships for mutual benefit is what is commonly called “networking.”

Of the Vietnamese immigrants who were settled in the urban area which is the setting for this study, most began their American lives in poverty, regardless of their

economic status in Vietnam. Indeed, “as a group, the Vietnamese started from low levels of human and financial capital and therefore offer a good basis for studying the contribution of social capital” to the development of human and financial capital (Zhou & Bankston, 1996, p. 202). This population represents an unusual juxtapositioning of these three forms of capital. Other researchers perceived a different relationship among the forms of capital, finding that social class, as measured by financial capital, is positively related to both human capital and the ability to access and exercise social capital (Horvat et al., 2003).

In the case of the Vietnamese immigrants who settled on the fringe of the urban area in this study, the ability to exercise social capital, that is, the networks within their families and ethnic community, was not positively related to social class, an indicator of financial and human capital (Zhou & Bankston III, 1998). This raises the question of what specific factors, like the roles of families and particularly, parent involvement, might contribute to the process of accessing social capital.

Parent Involvement

Historical Perspective

For the purposes of establishing a contextual basis for this study, only parental involvement in education in the nineteenth and twentieth century will be addressed because, as Coleman (1987) observes, “throughout the history and prehistory of the human race, mass formal schooling occupies less than a century. For most of society's children and youth, formal schooling hardly existed until this [twentieth] century” (p. 32).

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, parents and community had great influence over the activities of the schools. The community, inclusive of home, school,

and church, took responsibility for hiring and firing teachers as well as establishing the school calendar and school curriculum (Epstein, 2001). Parents were responsible for teaching their own children important life skills when their children were not in school. This created a great overlap of spheres of influence between the home and the school environments (Epstein, 1994). Yet, as the United States became more urbanized, this “legacy of village patterns of control...frustrated those who wished to standardize the schools...convinced that there was one best system of education” (Tyack, 1974, p. 28). While at one time “the whole structure of social and economic organization had as its basic building block the family, that changed, with the change accelerating from the latter half of the 19th century” (Coleman, 1987, p. 32).

Accordingly, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, a different pattern of family and school relations evolved, in which the school began to distance itself from the home. More emphasis was placed on the teachers’ professionalism and special knowledge. Teachers began to teach subject matter that was not familiar to parents. Eventually, parents became alienated from schools (Epstein, 2001). This trend of distancing of family and school continued well into the latter part of the twentieth century. However, the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), sounded a clarion call for educational reform. It set the stage for examination of a wide spectrum of educational issues that had the potential to impact student outcomes. Researchers began examining the construct of parent involvement more closely.

The Construct of Parent Involvement: Conceptual Frameworks

Cervone and O’Leary (1982) provided one of the first formalized frameworks for

the construct of parent involvement. They perceived that parent involvement occurred along a continuum, progressing from passive to active. This paradigm asserted that “teachers who want parents to be actively involved in their classrooms need [to] give careful thought to how they are going to move parents along the passive-active continuum” (p. 49). According to Cervone and O’Leary (1982), parents are engaged as passive participants when they act as receivers of information through receipt of newsletters, perusing parent bulleting boards, and receipt of information pertaining to home and weekend activities. On the other hand, parents are active participants when they interject their own ideas through such avenues as teaching in the classroom, parent-to-parent meetings, and parent objectives on the Individualized Education Plan (Cervone & O’Leary, 1982).

Comer (1989) later affirmed the continuum, or the linear metaphor, to describe the overall educational process. Despite the image of students plodding along a pre-determined pathway to education, he did acknowledge the importance of parent involvement, observing “schooling in America has taken a mechanistic turn . . . we have not paid enough attention to child development and relationship issues . . . it is child-rearing that enables development to take place and allows adequate academic learning to take place” (p. 125). Eventually, Comer, through his own and others’ (Comer et al., 1996; Frazier, 1999; Haynes et al., 1996) supporting research refined and codified his beliefs into a framework for school development that included parent and community involvement as key components for reforming education. The guiding principles of Comer’s (1996) plan, consensus, collaboration, and no-fault, were operationalized by teams of parents, students and staff. These teams created comprehensive school plans

addressing curriculum, instruction, assessment, social and academic climate and the sharing of information between school and community. Comer portrayed the dynamic among school, community and family using a flow chart to detail the relationships among players and directionality of interactions.

Pugh (1985) acknowledged the diverse perceptions of the relationships that exist between parents and educators, grouping the different ways to involve parents as non-participation, “being-there,” cooperation, collaboration, partnership, and control. Pugh’s categories of involvement are similar to those of Epstein and Connors (1992). Other researchers (Brandt, 1989) also identify and refer to the first five types of parent involvement proposed by Epstein and Connors: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, and decision making. Subsequently, Epstein (Epstein et al., 1997) added a sixth component, collaborating with community. This was the last step in developing a six-part typology to further refine her conceptual framework for parent involvement and to identify specific ways in which parent involvement is manifested. The conceptualization of the six types of parent involvement by Epstein and Connors tends to be inclusive and addresses the wide range of types of involvement investigated by many researchers on the topic of parent involvement. A description of the six types of parent involvement, parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with community, as developed by Epstein follows.

Parenting

One type of parent involvement is the basic obligation of parents. It includes the most fundamental level of support, such as the provision of food, shelter, and clothing. Additionally, parents are obligated to teach their children attitudes, beliefs, customs,

behaviors, and skills that are unique to the family. This type of involvement contributes to the child's sense of safety and well-being. Integral to this type of parent involvement is the building of positive home environments that support learning. To support the parents in this process, schools may provide parent workshops, general parent education and literacy training, assistance in accessing health, nutrition, and other services, as well as home visits to support families as their children transition between elementary, middle, and high school (Epstein and Connors, 1992; Epstein et al., 1997).

Communicating

A second type of involvement is the basic obligation of schools. This type of involvement entails designing effective forms of communication, flowing from school to home, and from home to school. The aim of this communication is to provide information about school programs and children's progress. Conferences occur at least annually with every parent, with follow-ups as appropriate. Student work is sent home on a regular basis for review and comment. Parents and students receive report cards, with an opportunity to confer on improving grades. Communications are clear and understandable for all families so that they can make an informed response. To insure clear lines of communication, translators are provided when needed (Epstein et al., 1997).

Volunteering

Parent involvement at school is a third type of involvement. However, it is the obligation of the school to recruit and organize parents. This includes parents volunteering to help teachers, administrators, students, and other parents. It also includes a parent room or family center for volunteer work, for meetings, and as a general

resource for families. A parent patrol or other activities to aid safety and operation of school programs is another component of volunteering (Epstein et al., 1997).

Volunteering may occur at any time, or at any place, and is not bound by either the school day, or the school facility. Volunteer schedules should be flexible to enable working parents to participate, matching whenever possible the parents' time and talents with school and student needs. In this type of involvement, volunteers are understood to be "anyone, anytime, any place who supports school goals or student learning" (Epstein & Connors, 1992, p. 3).

Learning at Home

A fourth type of involvement is parent involvement with learning at home. The parents may design learning activities independently, or with assistance from teachers. This involvement can also include very focused discussions about homework or school subjects that are parent-initiated, student-initiated, or teacher-directed. The intent of this type of involvement is to engage in activities that contribute to the child's success in school (Epstein & Connors, 1992).

This learning at home can be more inclusive than working on subject matter or study skills. Potentially, it includes encouraging parents to praise, guide, monitor, and discuss school issues and activities (Epstein & Lee, 1995).

Decision Making

The fifth type of involvement is participating in school governance. Parents may be active in parent organizations such as PTA or PTO, advisory councils, or committees addressing topics like curriculum, safety and school personnel. Parents may join independent advocacy groups to lobby and work for school improvements. Alternatively,

parents may serve on district level councils or committees for family and community involvement. Parents may form networks to link all families with parent representatives (Epstein et al., 1997). Parent leaders may emerge who contact and represent other families, gaining input from others and communicating those views to the school staff (Epstein, 1995).

Collaborating with Community

The sixth type of involvement describes the dynamic among school, parents, and community. In this component, schools, families, and students establish relationships with a variety of outside entities, including agencies, businesses, cultural groups, and community organizations (Epstein & Connors, 1992). This process implies that all the collaborating entities share responsibility and are stakeholders in children's education and in their future successes (Epstein, 1991; Epstein, 1994; Epstein, 1995; Epstein, 2001; Epstein & Connors, 1992; Epstein & Lee, 1995).

This type of involvement may include service integration for students through partnerships with civic organizations. It may include provision of information for students and families on community health, cultural, recreational, social support, and other programs or services. It may also include information on community activities that link to learning skills and talents, including after school and summer programs (Epstein et al., 1997).

These six types of involvement are not mutually exclusive. Categories may overlap. For example, following the evolution of the typology through Epstein's research, many of the sample practices which were suggested to operationalize the

different forms of involvement are very fluid, occurring under several different types of involvement across time (Epstein et al., 1997).

While I did not necessarily anticipate that the data collected during this research would reflect all of the types of parent involvement as described by Epstein (2001), this conceptual framework for parent involvement did provide a background against which to view this particular research community. The extent to which the data collected in this unique community reflects or departs from recognized constructs for parental involvement, such as Epstein's, is the basis for rich comparison. In addition to an awareness of paradigms for parental involvement during the course of data collection, it was important to be aware of the influences that impact parent involvement.

Influences on Parent Involvement

Not only does parent involvement manifest itself in a variety of ways, it is also influenced by many factors. Factors influencing parental involvement may derive from family characteristics, community characteristics, parents' experiences, parents' socioeconomic status (SES), parents' educational level, school practices, and students' grade level (Herman & Yeh, 1983; Lareau, 1987).

Family Characteristics

The level of parent involvement varies with the characteristics of the family. Family characteristics which influence parent involvement include family income, parents' working status, parents' education level, parents' marital status, parents' age and gender, number of children in the family, and parents' ethnic background (Louie, 2001; Nord, Brimhall, & West, 1997).

The character of the traditional Vietnamese family is influenced by a variety of cultural traditions. Because the country of Vietnam experienced long periods of Chinese occupation, many of the traditions that Vietnamese refugees brought with them to the United States were of Chinese origin (Detzner, 2004). The Chinese introduced Mahayana Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, which influenced the “inner core of family life” (Kibria, 1993, p. 43). One of the legacies of Confucianism is the widely practiced concept of the ancestral cult, wherein the importance of the family eclipses the importance of the individual. This view of the family is a key element in understanding the Vietnamese kinship system, which is fundamentally based on the Chinese system (Kibria, 1993).

Community Characteristics

The community in which the parents and school are embedded impacts the level of parent involvement. In general, Vietnamese who were resettled in the United States tended to form ethnic communities, which function much like the villages they had left behind. Kibria (1993) notes that in Vietnam, “much of the daily social life of village inhabitants revolved around the informal kin-centered networks running through the hamlets, which were an important source of mutual aid” (p. 41). About this specific community Zhou and Bankston (1996) found that “the immigrants tended to cluster and rebuild their communities, mostly in declining urban neighborhoods. This residential pattern means that many Vietnamese children grow up in close proximity to urban ghettos and in the often disruptive environment of urban public schools” (p. 202). The particular community in which the present study was conducted can be characterized as

blue collar, and is generally considered to be located in an area of the city that is in economic decline (Zhou & Bankston III, 2000a).

Parents' Experiences

The parents' pre-immigration experiences have strong potential for impacting their level of parental involvement. In general, Vietnamese American parents' pre-immigration experiences vary widely, depending in part on which wave of immigration they rode out of Vietnam.

From 1975 through the early 1990s, Vietnamese refugees poured into the United States in three significant phases (Zhou & Bankston III, 1998). Exiles who fled at the end of the war in 1975 and who comprised the first group were primarily military personnel, professionals, members of the Catholic Church, wealthy business owners, and elite members of the former South Vietnamese government (Takaki, 1998).

The second wave of immigration occurred in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It consisted, in general, of less privileged Vietnamese people. This group of immigrants was widely referred to as the "boat people" (Zhou & Bankston III, 2000a). They fled Vietnam in a flotilla of small, crowded boats "risking their lives at sea where storms threatened to drown them and pirates waited to rob them and rape the women (Takaki, 1998, p. 42). Two thirds of the boats were attacked by pirates (Takaki, 1998, p. 452). Many of these immigrants did a two step immigration to the United States, often finding themselves stranded in Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, or Thailand for months or even years while they waited for resettlement in the United States (Zhou & Bankston III, 1998, p. 27).

The third group of Vietnamese immigrants, arriving in the 1990s, was largely comprised of immigrants joining their families already resettled in the United States.

The majority of the immigrants who eventually settled in the community that encompasses the research site were part of the second wave of immigration (M. Nguyen, personal communication, October 3, 2002).

Parents' Socioeconomic Status

Aside from the first group of evacuees from South Vietnam in 1975, most of the Vietnamese refugees who fled to the United States were from rural areas (Zhou & Bankston III, 2000a). In particular, the Vietnamese living in the community surrounding the research site are characterized as having fairly low occupational status, often being described as “agriculturalists and fishermen” (Zhou & Bankston, 1996). The low socioeconomic status of the parents is confirmed by the qualification of 82% of the Vietnamese students in the research community for free or reduced lunch. In turn, the parents' socioeconomic status is predictably linked to parents' educational levels.

Parents' Educational Level

Parent educational levels have been a factor in other research which focused on social capital (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). In their study of Vietnamese high school students in this same community, Zhou and Bankston (1996) found that the majority of the Vietnamese parents in this community had “exceptionally low levels of education; less than a third had finished high school” (p. 205).

School Practices

According to Fine (1993), “Organizing for parent involvement is like bringing the ocean to a boil” (p. 682). Nonetheless, schools continue to respond to a growing body of

literature which documents the importance of school and family connections for increasing student success in school and accordingly, strengthening school programs (Epstein, 2001). Specifically, the schools in the research community have instituted a number of practices designed to foster positive relationships between the school and family. For example, a newsletter is published monthly in both English and Vietnamese to keep families apprised of accomplishments of individual and groups of students, important upcoming events, and particularly, opportunities for families to become more involved in the school community.

In addition, the research schools have established “parent rooms” which are designed to provide a welcoming environment for parents and which are staffed by parent liaisons fluent in a variety of languages, including English, French, and Vietnamese. These overt school practices are measured strategies to engage parents in the life of the school community.

Students’ Grade Level

In general, parent involvement in the form of parent volunteerism is highest with the lower grades. There is a notable decline in the level of parent volunteerism at the school building in the middle grades (Epstein, 2001). Several factors seem to be at play here: middle-grade educators report that they do not solicit volunteers because they believe that students do not want their parents at the school; parents report that they do not volunteer in their children’s middle grade schools partly because they work, and partly because they are not invited to volunteer (Epstein, 2001).

Research Question

My research question was conceptualized to add to the knowledge base about what parents representing a particular unique and unexplored subpopulation do to support their children's learning efforts. This study explored, from the student's perspective, what their parents' attitudes were toward school and education, and how those attitudes and the cultural context in which the children live affected their performance in school. My research question was: What are the perceptions of low SES, high academic achievement Vietnamese middle grades students of the factors within their communities and families that have contributed to their school achievement?

While there is recent research on Vietnamese families and Vietnamese high school students and social capital, there was little research on Vietnamese middle grades students and the potential effect of familial social capital on school performance (Kibria, 1993; Teachman, Paasch, & Carver, 1997; Zhou, 1997; Zhou & Bankston, 1996; Zhou & Bankston III, 2000a). By garnering the perspectives of these uniquely positioned students, this study can contribute to the existing body of literature.

Summary

This chapter described my developing personal interest in this research project, provided a general chronology of my professional experiences, as well as a more particular chronology of my experiences with high academic ability, low socioeconomic status Vietnamese students. This chapter described the theoretical framework for this study, social capital. Major topics in this chapter included parent involvement placed in an historical perspective, and a description of the construct of parent involvement within

the context of various conceptual frameworks. Further, this chapter described multiple factors that influence parent involvement. This chapter described the research question that is the focal point of this study.

CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH METHODS

How people make sense out of their lives is a major concern to qualitative researchers. A special interest of qualitative researchers lies in the perspectives of the subjects of a study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000, p. 503).

Overview

According to Glesne (1999) qualitative research is often supported by the constructivist paradigm. Using this paradigm, reality is set in the context of a world which is socially constructed, and always changing. Glesne indicates that qualitative research involves interacting and talking with participants about their perceptions, making this an appropriate paradigm for this study. The knowledge that derives from qualitative research is constructed, or interpreted, from the sense that people, including the researcher, derive from it. This knowledge is laced with the biases of the researcher because, as Glesne (1999, p. 6) notes, qualitative research uses “the researcher as instrument.”

Research methods for this study are detailed in this chapter. I have described the research design and questions, and discussed the nature of my research relationship with study participants. In this chapter I have detailed the sampling and data collection protocols, including specific information about the focus group and interview processes. Within the discussion of data analysis, I have also discussed the data reduction and display processes which I have used, as well as the process of drawing and verifying

conclusions. Additionally, I explored trustworthiness issues and described a set of strategies to support validation of the research.

Research Design

This study is well-matched to qualitative methodology because it is concerned with understanding the nature of relationships between the individuals, specifically, between the Vietnamese parent and child living within the context of a Vietnamese community in the United States, who find themselves functioning between two cultures and two geographic origins (Zhou & Bankston III, 2000a). This study sought to understand the dynamic between Vietnamese school children and their parents, embedded in a community, as it related to academic achievement. This investigation was focused on student perceptions of the roles that their parents play, within the context of home and community, in support of their learning. Social capital exists in the relationships among people (Coleman, 1988). The social capital of the parents and the role that it plays in supporting the academic achievement of the students are also investigated.

The qualitative paradigm is appropriate when the nature of the problem suggests exploratory research, and the variables are unknown (Creswell, 1994, p. 9). Additionally, when the context is critical, the qualitative research method better serves the purposes of the researcher (Creswell, 1994). Rather than being limited by rigid hypotheses and structured research questions, qualitative studies are bounded by the themes that have arisen from the language of the participants as they were interviewed. This enables a richness of data collection less available through traditional, quantitative research methods (Creswell, 1994).

My study is a qualitative study as described by Fraenkel and Wallen (2000), wherein the natural setting is the direct source of data, the researcher acts as the key instrument, and data are collected in the form of words (p. 503). Of the four subsets of qualitative data collection types, observation, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials, interviews seem most appropriate (Creswell, 1998). More specifically, focus group interviews (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996) referred to as focus group discussions in this study, seemed the most appropriate method for collecting data from these participants. Therefore, I used focus group discussions and individual interviews as the primary resources for data collection. Though mediated by me as the researcher, these processes literally gave “voice” to the participants.

Research Question

My research attempts to add to the knowledge base about the perceptions of low SES, high academic achievement Vietnamese American middle grade students of the factors within their families and communities that have contributed to their school achievement. The research question for this investigation asks: What are the perceptions of low SES, high academic achievement Vietnamese middle grade students of the factors within their communities and families that have contributed to their school achievement?

While there is recent and substantive research on Vietnamese families (Kibria, 1993) and Vietnamese high school students (Zhou, 1997; Zhou & Bankston III, 2000a) and social capital (Teachman et al., 1997; Zhou & Bankston, 1996) there is little research on Vietnamese middle grades students and the potential effect of familial social capital on school performance. By garnering the perspectives of these uniquely positioned students, this study contributed to the existing body of literature about social capital and

this particular population of parents and students.

Research Relationship with Participants

Establishing Rapport

Knowledge of the School and Community Context

During the school year prior to the present study, I had visited the schools, church, and surrounding community of the study participants. The schools were located within the school district in which I worked, and so routine responsibilities gave me ample opportunity to interact with teachers, students, administrators, and parent advocates at the school sites. The administrators at the school sites offered access to their schools and students, on an ongoing basis.

This familiarity with the research sites did warrant some caution. Because I entered the research sites with two identities, researcher and gifted programs administrator, there was the potential for role conflicts to arise. I learned to clearly delineate which role I was assuming when I entered the campuses. When approached about conducting activities that involved my other role/identity, I simply asked if I could address the concern or need at another, mutually agreed upon time.

My relationship with the ESL teachers and the parent liaisons at the school was positive, in the context of both my identities as researcher and as administrator. The relationship became more ambiguous, however, as I became an active researcher instead of an individual negotiating access to the research setting. I was able to establish a climate of trust at both schools, which was extremely helpful to the research process as I alternated between roles.

Knowledge of the Church

Many of the participating Vietnamese students and their families were Catholic, and active members of the local parish. Members of this particular church parish are exclusively Vietnamese. The religious leaders in this parish possessed and exercised considerable power in the community and in the lives of their parishioners. In meeting with the parish priest to discuss my research, I became aware that his assessment of the value and possible impact of my research on his church community was a critical component in going forward with the research project. It was clear to me that his advocacy within the community for my research was pivotal to the level of participation from the Vietnamese community. After I spoke with him at length, he agreed that he would announce and explain, from the pulpit, my research project and encourage parents to allow their children to participate. He also offered the assistance of the church youth to distribute letters and consent forms, assist parents in the mechanics of completing the forms, and getting the completed forms back to me. As I met with the priest, I became more aware of the many ways that this church touched the lives of its members.

This parish, in addition to religious activities, offered after-school tutoring, Vietnamese language classes, and a variety of social opportunities for its parishioners. I have been welcomed to various events in the church parish, and have had several in-depth conversations with the parish priest, and his predecessor, a Monsignor, who has since been transferred to another city to accept a position as Archbishop. Both of these religious leaders were cordial, welcoming me to participate in activities in their parish. They both have been supportive of the research process once I explained the questions that I would explore with members of their community.

Knowledge of the Culture

Because I have intermittently taught Vietnamese students across the seven years preceding the present study, I became familiar with customs related to their culture and ethnicity. I was invited to participate in the Tet Celebration, also known as Lunar New Year in the community, and have enjoyed the foods and costumes associated with the celebration. Tet cannot be properly celebrated without the traditional Dragon Dance, and I have watched the young Vietnamese high school students don the heavy segments of the dragon costume, quite excited, and emerge a short time later from the belly of the Dragon laughing, but hot and exhausted. I have participated in church fairs in the parish, and again have been welcomed with smiles, interesting food, and unusual music.

Another experience that I have had in this setting was with an organization that represents Asian Americans. Recently, the Asian Pacific American Society (APAS) held its annual gala, where they celebrated their membership in the Asian community. I was the guest of Miss Vietnam, the oldest of the single ladies representing her country of origin, and watched her be selected, despite her age, as Miss APAS. At first I was a little mystified why, from among all the beautiful, smiling college students, my friend in her middle years had been crowned in what appeared to be a beauty pageant. It wasn't until I saw the picture of all the women together and thought a little more about it, that I realized Miss Vietnam had been honored for her accomplishments, and the wisdom she had accrued with age. Unlike a Miss America pageant, youth and beauty were peripheral issues; veneration of age and wisdom, a culture-embedded value, was at play here.

Although I clearly remained an outsider based on my own ethnicity and language, my demonstrated willingness to acknowledge and value the unique aspects of the local Vietnamese community allowed me to move relatively freely in their community.

Identification of Potential Participants

In identifying potential participants, I was striving for six to eight participants for each grade level focus group, based on a synthesis of information garnered from conversations with my qualitative research methodologist and from other qualitative researchers (Vaughn et al., 1996). While Vaughn, et al (1996) discuss number of participants for focus group discussions, they do not address optimum group size for participants in this age range. I tempered their recommendation of six to twelve adult participants with information from the qualitative research methodologist on my committee who had worked extensively with children in individual interviews and focus group discussions.

Penultimately, I identified forty-four potential study participants. Through a very protracted process, consent for participation was sought from the parents of these forty-four students. Ultimately, twenty parents consented to their child's participation in the study. These individuals met all the eligibility requirements to participate in the study. That is, each person had attained high academic achievement; qualified for free or reduced lunch; and, was of Vietnamese ethnicity. Once the students had been identified, it was necessary to obtain parent permission for their participation in the study.

Process

Parental Permission Process

Parish Priest as Gatekeeper and Facilitator

Before the consent forms were distributed, I informed both the parish priest and the parent liaisons at the schools about the general research procedures as well as the particulars of the consent process, and answered questions pertaining to the research project. They were the most likely secondary points of contact in the event that the parents had concerns but were not comfortable approaching me directly. Obtaining parents' permission for their children to participate in the study proved to be a multi-tiered evolution. While my research proposal was being formally reviewed by the school district and Human Subjects Committee at the university, I was engaging in informal conversations with the principal parish priest at the Catholic Church in the community. Various school personnel had advised me that he was a potential gatekeeper for the ethnic community. Accordingly, I spoke with him on several occasions in October and November, describing the research and addressing his questions and concerns. He was open to the research project being conducted in his community, and suggested that I contact him again when I had completed the formal process of getting my research approved. In late January I obtained approval from the Human Subjects Committee, and contacted the parish priest again. He suggested that I provide an informational article for the church newsletter a few weeks before I scheduled the focus group discussions. In addition, he asked that I attend one or two religious services and he would introduce me,

as well as the research project, from the pulpit and encourage parents to allow their children to participate.

Seeking Consent for Fifth and Sixth Grade Students

Following my introduction to the congregation at several masses in late January celebrating Tet, or Lunar New Year, I went to one of the research schools. From the campus, I sent parent consent forms, printed in both Vietnamese and English, home with the twenty-five eligible fifth and sixth grade students.

Of the twenty-five parents solicited for consent, seven fifth grade parents and five sixth grade parents signed and returned the forms. The fifth and sixth grade students were in self-contained classrooms, and were clustered, as high academic achievement students, in four classrooms. This grouping made disseminating and gathering the parent permission forms relatively easy.

Seeking Consent for Seventh and Eighth Grade Students

By contrast, the nineteen seventh and eighth grade students who were eligible for participation were not in self-contained classrooms, nor were they clustered by ability. These students were scattered across their campus as they changed classes every 55 minutes, following a schedule format more typical of secondary schools. Even though I had the cooperation of the school principal and her support staff in accessing the seventh and eighth graders, I thought it would be less disruptive and problematic to mail the consent forms to the homes of the seventh and eighth grade students. Parental response to the mail out was minimal. Two weeks after the forms had been mailed, exactly one parent had returned the signed consent form. Clearly, another strategy to secure consent was indicated.

Obtaining class schedules for each of the nineteen prospective participants, I went from classroom to classroom and introduced the research project and myself to students. When I indicated that the focus group discussions were scheduled at lunchtime in order not to disturb academic schedules, and that I was providing pizza and soft drinks, the enthusiasm level seemed to rise markedly. I sent another round of parent permission forms home, this time with students. When I went back to the school several days later to collect the parent permission forms, none of the students had brought back completed forms.

I called the parish priest, explaining that I was having little success obtaining parent permission despite his positive introduction of me to his congregation. He asked that I bring another set of letters explaining the project and the parent permission forms, and he would see to it that the parents were contacted individually and provided additional explanation in Vietnamese. He volunteered his sister, who is the Director of Head Start for the community, to individually contact each of the families. I didn't hear from her for several days, possibly because the Mardi Gras holiday interrupted her work as well as the school schedule. Noticing that time was slipping by, I decided to contact the school principal to see if she had any suggestions as to how to obtain parent permissions. She referred me to the English as a Second Language (ESL) Instructor in the school, who called parents about the project and solicited their permission. He explained in Vietnamese, in as much detail as desired by the parents, what the project involved. Among those parents who were available for a telephone conversation, most agreed to allow their children to participate. At my request, the ESL instructor made

arrangements for me to go by each student's home to obtain signatures and set up times when it would be convenient for me to come by.

Map in hand, I went from one home to the next. I was cordially received, although it was clear in many of the homes that the parents were not comfortable speaking English. I assumed that the ESL instructor's thorough job of explaining was providing me with *entrée* and a relatively warm reception from these same parents who had been non-responsive to the two earlier requests for consent.

In one of the homes, it was obvious that the parents had requested a meeting time that would allow for one of the older children to return from school to speak with me. When I asked the student why her parents had not returned the form earlier she said, "They saw that it was in English, and put it right into the trash can." In fact, the consent form had been printed in Vietnamese on one side of the paper, and English on the other.

This response to English language may reflect the parents' pervasive effort to maintain the home culture and language. Zhou (1997) asserts that many Vietnamese parents are concerned both with making the best of a new environment and with retaining traditional family life. Thus, embracing English, or for that matter, any language which could potentially displace the primacy of Vietnamese, could be contrary to the overarching goal of maintaining traditional family life.

A day of telephoning with the assistance of the ESL instructor and door-to-door contacts netted eleven more completed parent permission forms from parents of seventh and eighth grade students. Adding these seven seventh grade parents and five eighth grade parents to the seven fifth grade parents and five sixth grade parents who had already consented to their children's participation in the study, I now had enough students

at each grade level to participate in the focus group discussions and individual interviews. For each grade level, I had obtained consent for five to seven students to participate in the study.

Process for Identifying Focus Group Participants

Anticipating that there would be some group member attrition as a result of absence or scheduling conflicts, I decided that I would allow all students whose parents had consented and who were present at school the day that the focus group was scheduled for their grade level group to participate in the process.

For the most part, my decision to allow all present students to participate in the focus group discussions resulted in appropriate focus group size. However, the fifth grade focus group, the first to meet, had seven potential participants, all of whom were present on the day the focus group discussion was scheduled. Although this group size proved to be unwieldy for me as the moderator, the large group size was partially offset by the students' reluctance to respond simultaneously to the questions posed.

Several factors may have contributed to their passivity. My inexperience conducting focus group discussions with this age group may have been a factor. The fact that we met for the focus group discussions in a classroom setting may also have influenced the fifth grade students. This possibility is suggested by the fact that at first they would respond to questions only by raising their hands and waiting to be called on. Furthermore, my ethnic status as a non-Asian may have caused some hesitancy among the students and limited their responses.

Each of the subsequent focus group discussions for sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students consisted of four students, even though a larger number of students in each

grade qualified and had been given parent permission to participate. I hand carried invitations including the time, date, and location of each of the focus group meetings to the schools for each of the consenting prospective participants. However, on the actual day of the focus group, several students were unable to participate due to absence from school. In a sense, students self-selected for participation in the focus group process by encouraging or allowing their parents to complete the consent form and by being present on the day scheduled for their focus group.

Process for Identifying Individual Interviewees

The process for identifying participants for the interview process was more clearly controlled by me as the researcher. I listened to the tapes and reviewed the transcripts from the focus groups, noting which students were most responsive. In addition, I reviewed the focus group transcripts to look for richness and thoughtfulness of responses. In some cases, individual focus group members had introduced ideas that seemed to warrant further exploration either to attain clarification or to expand on their initial responses.

As part of the selection process, I also conferred with two colleagues experienced in qualitative research to get their insights. After they had perused the focus group transcripts, they identified several focus group members, including a very confrontational member of the seventh grade focus group, who they believed would be important to include in individual interviews. My preliminary list of interviewees included the students that they had identified, affirming the potential value that I had seen in further discussion with these individuals.

Confidentiality

In addition to the need for knowledge of the culture, establishing rapport was another component that was crucial to building a research relationship: establishing a basis for trust. There must be trust that shared information will be used appropriately and will respect the boundaries of confidentiality. The parents of the participants signed a consent form (See Appendix A). The consent form explained, briefly, that the results of the research would be used to help increase learning opportunities for their children. This form was translated into the dominant home language, and provided definitive steps taken to insure confidentiality. The assurances of confidentiality included the names/roles of persons having access to privileged information, the guarantee of anonymity of the participants and individual schools in the written report, and the assurance that all research materials, including notes, forms, tapes and transcripts would be maintained in a secure area for a period of three years in accordance with university graduate school guidelines.

Sampling

I used purposeful sampling to identify the participants in this study. According to Patton (1980), purposeful sampling is an appropriate strategy for learning about certain select cases, when there is no need to generalize to all such cases. Discussion of the research population includes criteria for participation, gaining access to participants, and a general description of the participants.

Criteria for Participation

The participants in this study were volunteers. They were Vietnamese American students, who were enrolled in one of two schools within an urban community with a

high concentration of Vietnamese families. In addition, participants were currently enrolled in grades 5 – 8, eligible for free or reduced lunch and academically high achieving. Students' eligibility for free or reduced lunch is recognized by the federal government as one of the guidelines for establishing that a family is living below the poverty threshold (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003). For the purpose of this study, students were considered to be academically high achieving if they had a minimum of 3.0 Grade Point Average, or scored at or above the fifth stanine on standardized tests. In this urban school district, under a compliance order from the Office of Civil Rights, ethnic minority students, and particularly students who have been classified as English Language Learners (also known as English as a Second Language students) can be identified for academically gifted classes using a modified matrix that is less stringent than the matrix used for majority culture students (J. Lloyd, personal communication, August 12, 1999). Therefore, it seems appropriate to use slightly less rigorous criteria for Vietnamese American participants in this study than might otherwise be used for language/culture majority students to establish their status as academically high achieving. Furthermore, only students whose parents signed a written consent form were eligible to participate.

Gaining Access to Participants

Gaining access to participants involved multiple steps. In order to solicit the participation of students for this study, formal permission had to be obtained from the school district. The first step in securing permission to research was to find one or several individuals within the school district who could facilitate the process of obtaining official permission to conduct research.

Administrative Permission. Permission to conduct the study came from the Compliance Officer in this urban school district. I spoke with him and obtained the packet to request permission to conduct research and approval for my study. The application required submission of: a detailed description of the project, types of participants required, sampling techniques, data gathering techniques, instruments, general procedures, and designation of research sites. The school district also required that the district's Director of the Bilingual/ESL programs review the proposal for cultural appropriateness. In addition, I was required to execute a "Researcher's Agreement," which outlined my obligations as the researcher. After a review of all applicable documents, the school district representative granted formal, written permission to conduct research (See Appendix B).

In addition, formal permission had to be obtained from the Human Subjects Committee at the university (See Appendix C). Once permission was obtained from the school system and the university, the parents of these participants were solicited to obtain informed consent for their children's participation in the study.

Participants

Potential participants in this study were identified through a review of student records at each research site. Permission to review student records for standardized test scores, Grade Point Average, and free and reduced lunch eligibility was obtained through the research approval process with the school district, which required detailed descriptions of data collection processes.

Once potential participants in the research study were identified, a letter (Appendix D) was sent to their parents. This letter explained the scope and the goals of

the project. This letter also listed the possible benefits of participation for parents and their children, and requested consent for their children's participation. Once consent was obtained, the parents were asked to complete a brief demographic survey, and sign a consent form (See Appendix A), translated into the dominant home language, which provided definitive measures used to insure confidentiality.

The priest at the local Catholic Church offered young persons' services from his parish to provide assistance to any parents who might have experienced some difficulty understanding or completing the form. His apparent intent was to ensure that the consent provided by the parents was truly informed consent and that the communication was deemed culturally appropriate. Participants in the study ultimately consisted of that subset of potential participants for whom parental consent had been obtained.

Research Sites

Two urban school sites were selected as research locations for this study. One school had an enrollment of 761 students, 61% of which were African American, 34% were Asian, 2% were Hispanic, .009% were White, and .0013% were Native American. The other school had an enrollment of 1,139 students, 87% of which were African American, 11% were Asian, 1% were Hispanic, and .01% were White. These schools were selected because they included students in the middle grades, a high concentration of students receiving free or reduced lunches, and a relatively large concentration of Asian students (at least 10%). The last characteristic was incorporated to maximize opportunities to access Vietnamese students. Furthermore, school system personnel had identified these schools as having large concentrations of Vietnamese students (C.M. Steber, personal communication, January 29, 2001). The schools were situated within a

large urban school district with an enrollment of approximately 75,000 students, 91% African American, 1% Hispanic, 2% Asian and 55,000 on the free or reduced lunch program (New Orleans Public Schools, 2003).

Barriers and Bridges

According to Creswell (1994, p. 148) it is important to gain access to research by seeking the approval of gatekeepers. These gatekeepers can either serve as barriers or bridges, depending upon their disposition toward the researcher and the research project. Failure to identify the gatekeepers at each level presents the possibility of creating a “stall” in the research process. In this research setting, there were multiple gatekeepers to be courted: the school principals, the parent liaisons, and the parish priest.

Within the school district, the school principals and the Vietnamese parent liaisons functioned as the gatekeepers. The school principals served as gatekeepers in the sense that they are responsible for whatever occurs on their campuses. Ever-spiraling levels of accountability have disposed all principals in this school district to critically examine any proposed activities at their schools to insure that they are educationally justifiable. Because I indicated to these principals that data collection would occur outside of instructional time, they were more willing to support and approve the proposed research activities. Generally, I found the principals easy to approach regarding the conduct of research on their campuses. Across several previous semesters, I had spoken with each of them individually and discussed the research project as it was being conceptualized. Furthermore, in my district role as Coordinator for Gifted and Talented Programs, I had worked with both principals in the past to provide support for the academically gifted programs at their schools, and that gave me access to and credibility

with them. Although I had gained the approval and trust of the principals, I knew it was almost as important to establish a relationship with the Vietnamese parent liaisons.

On each campus, the parent liaisons assumed a nurturing and protective role for the population of students and parents they represented. This protective role was magnified by the fact that their own children were enrolled at the schools. As part of the process of establishing rapport, I met on multiple occasions with the parent liaisons both formally and informally. During one of these meetings, a parent liaison spoke with me very candidly about the importance of getting support for my research from the parish priest at the Catholic Church located in the community that surrounds the research schools.

In a subsequent meeting with the parish priest, I discovered that he acted as a gatekeeper in that he would strive to protect his parishioners from outside influences that he perceived could have a negative impact on them. He appeared to be particularly protective of the children in his parish because they are potentially more vulnerable due to the naiveté associated with youth. He evidenced this role when he spoke to me of his concerns about other students living in the community who were not part of the church parish or ethnic community coming to play basketball at the church's recreational facilities. He indicated that he had strongly discouraged these "other" students from coming to play, saying that he could not be responsible for them and could not assume the financial liability that could arise from one of the outsider students being injured while playing.

As an outsider proposing to research within the community, I was concerned that the parish priest would perceive that the project or my presence might pose some problem

to the community. However, when I outlined the proposed research project, the priest listened carefully and then offered his support in encouraging parents in his congregation to allow their children to participate in the study.

Without exception, the multiple gatekeepers in this community, including school principals, parent liaisons, and the parish priest, expressed support of my research and acknowledged the study as being worthwhile.

Cultural Appropriateness

The school district's Director of the English as a Second Language program reviewed the research proposal to determine whether or not it was culturally appropriate. This individual was attuned to the Vietnamese community that was the focal point of this study because of her frequent interactions with community members. Although she is not Vietnamese, she had two full time staff members who were Vietnamese and who consulted with her when there were concerns about that ethnic community. Under the auspices of her role as ESL Director, she had conducted surveys with these parents to determine their home language, and had routinely provided native speaker translators from her staff to help these parents negotiate and interact with school district personnel. Furthermore, she had been an active participant in cultural events such as the Tet Celebration for the Lunar New Year, and in school-based multicultural celebrations recognizing the rich diversity of cultures, including Vietnamese, in the school district. Along with her Vietnam-born Central Office staff members, she often entered the schools and surrounding community. Because of her ongoing interactions with members of this community across the period of a decade, she was uniquely positioned to assess the cultural appropriateness of this study.

Following a review of all documents for cultural sensitivity and appropriateness by the ESL Director, as well as a review by the district Compliance Officer for overall acceptability and appropriateness of the research proposal using school district criteria, the research was approved. The letters from the school district over the signatures of the ESL Director and the school district Compliance Officer, providing formal permission to conduct research, are included in Appendix B. Attainment of formal permission brought the process one step closer to data collection.

Data Collection

Data collection was accomplished through the use of focus group discussions (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990) and individual interviews (Weiss, 1994). The following sections discuss the focus group discussion and individual interview processes, the need for tape recording and note taking, and the format for the discussion and interview guides.

The Focus Group Process

“The focus group technique is a tool for studying ideas in group context. It provides a means for studying one of the cherished propositions of social sciences: The whole is greater than the parts” (Morgan, 1988).

Four focus group discussions were conducted. The interaction of participants in focus groups provided several advantages to me as the researcher. Practitioners have found that group interactions tend to produce a wider range of information, insights, and ideas than are typically produced by just accumulating the responses of individuals (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). As participants were stimulated by the topic and the general level of excitement in the group, they tended to springboard off the ideas of

others. Also, participation in a group environment allowed individuals to be more candid, more spontaneous, and less conventional, resulting in a more accurate reflection of the individuals' actual positions on some topics (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990; Vaughn et al., 1996). Thus, the use of focus groups was very important in facilitating the exploration of my topic.

Membership in a particular focus group was determined by the participants' grade level. Based on earlier experience with focus groups, I had determined that the more homogenous a focus group is with regard to immutable characteristics such as ethnicity and age, the more coherent the data collected. This was of particular concern with regard to students; a year or two difference in age may mean a significantly different ability to verbalize ideas. I intended to use a semi-structured format for the discussions. The focus groups lasted approximately forty-five minutes. Previously, I had conducted research with middle grades student focus groups to explore school improvement issues. Based on that research experience and my knowledge of attention spans for middle grades students, I thought that it was unrealistic to expect that a focus group discussion could productively extend beyond forty-five minutes.

These sessions were conducted during the students' lunch period and recreational time. They were conducted in classrooms, which were not being used for instruction at the time.

The Individual Interview Process

Interviews are purposeful dialogues that involve both questioning and active listening. As Glesne (1999) indicates, the interview process involves both interacting and talking with participants to gain knowledge about their point of view, or, potentially, to

see an issue from another, perhaps insider, viewpoint. Indeed, “through interviewing we can learn about places we have not been and could not go...we can learn about the quality of neighborhoods or what happens in families...” (Weiss, 1994, p.1).

Furthermore, “interviewing is one of the most common and powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow human beings” and most commonly involves face-to-face verbal interchange (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 645). This particular method was closely aligned with my intent of garnering the perceptions of children regarding the roles that their ethnic community, their culture, and their parents played in supporting their academic lives.

Weiss (1994) discusses a variety of terms that are applied to qualitative interviewing, including intensive, in-depth, depth, unstructured, conversational, narrative, and nondirective interviews. The style of interviewing which best matched the purpose of the present study was the nondirective research interview, in which the interviewer adopts an attentive, non-judgmental stance. As Weiss (1994) explains, “the interviewer in a qualitative interview is not nondirective in the Rogerian manner, reflecting and clarifying but otherwise passive; rather, the interviewer guides the interview through a definite research agenda” (p.28). Although I posed questions as the interviewer, my primary role was that of listener. To ensure that I directed the interview in accordance with my research agenda, I constructed and used an interview guide (Appendix E). At the same time, an integral aspect of qualitative research, which must be considered, is its emergent nature, which sometimes necessitated the considered modification of the interview guide as the research progressed.

Because data obtained in a focus group had the potential to be biased by a dominant or opinionated group member (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990), I initiated the use of individual interviews to confirm or temper results obtained in the group setting and to gain perspectives of individual students about their experiences, particularly within their unique family settings. I used a semi-structured format (see Appendix F) for the interviews. The individual interviews lasted approximately fifteen to twenty minutes. These sessions were conducted outside of instructional time, frequently at the students' lunch time. I often used the classroom for academically talented students when it was available.

Tape Recording

The focus group discussions and individual interviews were tape recorded, using only audio, for several reasons. With tape recording, there was less necessity to take extensive notes during the interview process. Some of the participants spoke in highly inflected English which, when recorded on tape, could be reviewed multiple times to ascertain or clarify meaning. In the analysis phase of the study, the tape recordings and transcripts of focus group discussions and individual interviews provided concrete data that helped address reliability issues.

Tape recording, however, had some pitfalls. From previous experience, I knew that there might be technical problems (defective tapes, battery or microphone failure, or other tape recorder malfunctions) and that there might be situational problems (ambient noise levels unexpectedly rise, the interview is interrupted, etc.). Specifically, from previous experience with focus groups, I knew that it could be difficult to distinguish one participant's voice from another, especially if several people attempted to speak at once

in response to a prompt or another participant's response. The resultant "talk-over" occasionally presented transcription and understanding problems. However, use of multiple tape recorders and other equipment redundancy (e.g. microphones, batteries) provided some insurance against both technical and "talk over" problems. Misplaced and/or mislabeled tapes were also a potential problem. Developing consistent procedures for labeling a tape-recorded interview immediately after the completion of the interview helped alleviate this concern. I identified a secure method for transporting and storing tape recordings. The tape recordings always stayed in my possession while I was on the research site. Later, they were stored in multi-pocket file folders in my research office, which was accessible only to me.

Interpretation of the sound bites recorded on the audio-tape, in addition to the technical and situational difficulties described above, was occasionally a problem. To minimize the potential for such difficulties, I had another individual transcribe the tapes for the focus group discussions and individual interviews, and then I listened to the tape recordings and checked the transcripts for inaccuracies. This essentially provided a cross-check for accuracy which would be less available with only one person listening to the tapes. I also enlisted the assistance of a native speaker of Vietnamese on an as-needed basis to support that process. To facilitate the data reduction process, I had all the focus group discussions and/or individual interviews transcribed immediately following the meeting.

Note-taking

Note-taking was supplemental to the tape recording, and occurred contemporaneously with the focus group discussions and individual interviews. Note-

taking not only included immediate data collection, but also also encompassed the practice of “memoing”(Miles & Huberman, 1994). The value of reflective practice demonstrated by creating memos is also affirmed by Maxwell (1996). Indeed, Maxwell asserts that “Memos do for ideas what field notes and transcripts do for perception: they convert thought into a form that allows examination and further manipulation”(p. 12). Memos were sometimes as casual as a hasty notation in the margin of a transcript. Other times, the memos were formal, written as an entry in my research journal. Memos were saved, coded, and “mined” later.

I recorded notes pertaining to my research process in a journal, and used the journal for memo writing as an ongoing practice for the duration of the research. My notes encompassed not only details, but also more over-arching observations that pertained to focus group and individual interview methodology.

Interview Guide

The focus group discussion and individual interview guides (Appendices E and F) were semi-structured. This afforded me, as the interviewer, some flexibility to pursue emergent issues that were related to the specified questions in the focus group discussion and individual interview guides. The guides consisted of a series of open-ended questions (as opposed to questions that have single word, or yes/no responses) designed to stimulate fluency and extended discussion of the topic. In addition, I used probes to encourage elaboration on the topic. Probes (Vaughn et al., 1996) are “invitations to expand on previous statements so responses are more fully revealed” (p. 82). The discussion guide for the focus group was designed to elicit responses about the students’ perceptions of the broader cultural and community contexts for this study. On the other

hand, the discussion guide for the individual interviews was designed to elicit responses regarding a student's perceptions in the more closely defined context of individual families. Across time, as the research project was conceptualized and then conducted, I revised the focus group and interview guides as the discussions and interviews were conducted with the various participants. Appendices E and F demonstrate the multiple iterations of interview guides that evolved across the span of the research process.

I read the transcripts, listening to the tape recordings while reading and checking for accuracy. Immediately following each group discussion or individual interview, I also reviewed the field notes that had been taken concurrently with the interviews.

Data Analysis

In contrast to quantitative research, which relies on deductive reasoning to draw conclusions, qualitative research analysis is largely inductive in nature. Analyzing words, identifying themes and synthesizing data from multiple sources reflect the ongoing, emergent process of qualitative data analysis.

The analysis of qualitative research is not reliant on any one, particular method. The method of analysis arises from the research question and from the data collected. As Patton (1980) noted,

The data generated by qualitative methods are voluminous. I have found no way of preparing students for the sheer massive volumes of information with which they will find themselves confronted when data collection has ended. Sitting down to make sense out of pages of interviews and whole files of field notes can be overwhelming (p. 297).

Later, however, qualitative methodologists Miles and Huberman (1994) offered “flows of activity” to make the analysis process more manageable: data reduction, data displays, and conclusion drawing/verification.

Data Reduction

My study consisted of focus groups and individual interviews. Both the focus groups and individual interviews generated substantial transcripts. The data reduction process required that I, as the researcher, sift, sort, and prioritize the data. The winnowing process continued for the duration of the research, but became more structured as the volume of data (e.g., transcripts and field notes) increased. Miles & Huberman (1994) describe the data reduction process as an analytic activity which involves the “process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, transforming the data that appear in written-up field notes or transcriptions” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). One of the key activities in the overall data reduction process was coding.

Coding

As part of the data reduction process, I conducted a preliminary coding of the transcripts. Coding was the first analytical step in the organization of data. It involved developing a coding system that was refined and expanded as the study developed. The coding system was organized according to emergent themes or concepts, rather than frequency of occurrence. In order to facilitate the accessing of chunks of data later, the coding system also identified location of information within transcripts (e.g., Data source – focus group grade five –FG5; line – ll; speaker number -S#; individual interviewee number- II#). This became an important tool when I found it necessary to tie data back to the source document or individual participant.

Data Displays

The next major activity in the analysis process was the creation of data displays, as described by Miles & Huberman (1994). A data display is “an organized, compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action” (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 11). Visual data displays provide the researcher a different way to understand the data, and provide an alternative way of “knowing,” using “forms of communicating that we do not normally use to represent what we have learned about the educational world” (Eisner, 1997, p. 5). This may involve the use of charts, diagrams, matrices, pictures, or other visual forms (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I used matrices, which were structured with defined rows and columns, as a tool for organizing and displaying data. I observed the tenets of data display development as described by Miles and Huberman (1994), recalling that “creating a good display format usually requires a number of iterations, sometimes with new data collection intervening,” and that “form follows function” (p. 92). The data displays evolved as data was collected and the study developed. The form that the data display took reflected the themes and issues emerging from the unique data collected. There were multiple steps in developing a data display, and the initial steps were coding activities. The first step was identifying meaningful units found in the words and actions of the participants in the study, as they related to the research question. Patterns and themes were noted in the left-hand margins, next to the line numbering. Later in the process, I reviewed these chunks of data to see if I could identify more focused patterns or themes and to see if they might provide the basis for establishing larger categories of meaning. When I was able to identify chunks that were related, I cut up the transcripts, collating related chunks, and used map pins to secure

them to color-coded, fabric-covered data boards, which were then displayed around the walls of my research office.

Miles and Huberman (1994) state that traditionally, qualitative analysis has focused on a “single, bounded context-the ‘case’” (p. 172). It is viable, however, to study “multiple individual cases” (Miles & Huberman, p. 172) across a population of individuals who share similar characteristics (e.g. students, Vietnamese parents, etc.). The comparative nature of studying multiple individual cases offered the possibility of discovering that findings for a single case are not isolated instances. It speaks to a form of generalizability of data and findings, broadening the implications for a study. Miles and Huberman (1994), however, stress the importance of maintaining respect for the uniqueness of individuals and they caution against forming hasty generalizations.

To analyze the data from the focus group discussions, I first coded the transcripts from each focus group as it was conducted. I then developed a matrix to reduce the data to a manageable format. If the data collected from the discussion groups at each grade level had sufficient common factors as demonstrated on each matrix, I developed a matrix comparing data from the focus group discussions. The focus group discussions presented the potential for synergy among group members (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). However, the information obtained from any one focus group was considered one piece of data. Initially, I conducted a within-case analysis of the data from each focus group (Miles & Huberman, 1994), and then conducted a cross-case analysis among the focus groups, again treating each focus group as a unit.

In analyzing data from the individual interviews, I first coded the transcripts. Then I reviewed the coding to determine themes and issues that had emerged in the

interview process. Then I developed a matrix to display the data more concisely and to support the next process, conclusion drawing and verification. Then transcripts were color-coded by speaker and theme represented. The resultant transcript was jig-sawed into small pieces of data, and the color-coded thematic information was mounted on the matching color-coded data board.

Drawing and Verifying Conclusions

“People are meaning-finders; they can very quickly make sense of the most chaotic events” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 245).

The process of “making good sense” (Miles & Huberman, 1994) of data is, in more precise research terms, drawing and verifying conclusions. This process begins early on in the process of data collection when the researcher identifies tactics for generating meaning, which may include noting patterns and themes, seeing plausibility and clustering, and making metaphors. The researcher then identifies tactics for testing or confirming findings, such as checking for representativeness and researcher bias, checking the meaning of outliers, and looking for rival explanations. The researcher then applies standards for assessing the quality of the conclusions, checking for trustworthiness.

Trustworthiness Issues

Lincoln and Guba (1985) are among the earliest researchers to discuss the issue of trustworthiness in qualitative research. As a result of their seminal work, qualitative researchers frequently use their nomenclature to describe the components of trustworthiness as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

The concept of credibility challenges the reader to assess whether the study clearly describes both the participants and the setting for the study. Earlier in this study, participants and the community in which they live were described in considerable detail for the reader. Demographic information for study participants and their families was collected and displayed in several tables in the study. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants to protect their identity. The research setting was described, taking care to mask the specific geographic location of the research community and the research schools.

Triangulation

Triangulation of data is a step that was taken to strengthen the credibility of the study. In this process, data from one source was validated against another source of data, as was evidenced by comparing information from multiple participants in separate interviews. Data from one focus group was compared to data from other focus groups. Observations were conducted and data from the observations was, in turn, compared to data from other data collection media such as interviews and focus group discussions.

Transferability

Transferability is the second component that Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe. Transferability in the qualitative research paradigm is the rough equivalent of generalizability in the realm of quantitative research. In effect, it addresses how the findings of the study might be related, or generalized to, the population and setting of another study or prospective study. Meaning is literally built, or constructed by the reader in the qualitative constructivist paradigm. Therefore, it is incumbent on the reader

to determine if one instance of research has transferability to another, based on the reader's constructed meaning. However, as the researcher, I have attempted to facilitate the process by conducting cross case analyses to demonstrate possible transferability from one case (one focus group discussion) to other cases (additional focus group discussions) in the study.

Dependability

The third component in Lincoln and Guba's (1985) discussion of trustworthiness is dependability, which alludes to the researcher's responsibility to account for design variations that develop as the study is conducted. The emergent nature of qualitative inquiry, as well as the potential for changes in the research setting make this a particularly challenging piece of the trustworthiness puzzle. To offset or compensate for the shifting variables, I created memos, a practice suggested by other researchers (Miles & Huberman, 1994), to track changes and delineate the need for further changes in the methodology.

Confirmability

The fourth component in the Lincoln and Guba (1985) discussion of trustworthiness is confirmability, which is directly related to researcher subjectivity. Because the qualitative researcher is essentially the "instrument" for collection of data, there is a heightened potential for the researcher's subjectivity and bias to unduly impinge on the research processes, including the processes of data collection and data analysis. Some of the ways to palliate the effect of researcher subjectivity are addressed by Creswell (1994) who clearly articulates strategies to actively pursue trustworthiness concerns. He addresses the confirmability aspect of trustworthiness through multiple

verification procedures. He suggests the use of some, or all, of these strategies to establish confirmability of research. Of these strategies, I used peer review and debriefing, alternative hypotheses, and clarification of researcher bias.

Peer review and debriefing. The validation process was not complete until the final activity of verification was completed. Verification included testing the early or tentative findings that had emerged for plausibility and trustworthiness. This required a return to the original data. A helpful strategy was to engage a peer to help formulate alternative hypotheses in order to compare to hypotheses that were being reviewed for plausibility. When this peer was able to assume a notably adversarial or opposing viewpoint, the exercise was even more valuable.

Peer review was an ongoing process that I engaged in with a fellow doctoral student who was also conducting qualitative research through the use of focus groups. This researcher has extensive experience as a writer and peer reviewer, most notably through an experience that we shared as part of the National Writing Project. As a qualitative researcher and as a writer trained in the art of constructive criticism, she was uniquely positioned to provide substantive and meaningful feedback as I proceeded through the data gathering, analysis, and reduction phases of the research process. We met on an as needed basis to discuss works in progress for our mutual research projects. These meetings occurred most frequently during the data display and conclusion drawing stages of the research in order to support the confirmability of the research.

During the peer review process, the individual asked critical questions, put forth opposing hypotheses, and validated agreement of patterns and themes. In addition, this individual challenged my researcher subjectivity/biases on an ongoing basis. We met to

discuss emerging themes and patterns after the first focus group. There was another meeting at approximately the halfway point in the data analysis and reduction process. I also arranged a meeting after the last interview, and during the final phases of writing the findings for the research.

Alternative hypotheses. Developing alternative hypotheses is a conscious search on the part of the researcher for disconfirming evidence, or outliers, so that the researcher can refine the working hypotheses driving the research process (Creswell, 1998). This required me, as the researcher, to see the research through a different set of lenses, to be a “devil’s advocate” for an opposing viewpoint. This is reminiscent of a debate exercise, wherein a hypotheses or proposition is put forth, and the debater argues the positive, or confirming aspects of the proposition for a finite period of time. When the bell sounds, the debater makes a 180 degree turn, and debates the issue from the totally opposite perspective.

I reviewed the data as part of the validation process to see if I could discover outliers that supported an opposing point of view or supported different findings in opposition to previously determined findings.

Clarification of Researcher Bias

Clarification of researcher bias was perhaps the most challenging of the verification steps. It required that I reveal any personal, professional, or theoretical biases, enabling the reader to determine when my biases were coloring the results of the research. In Chapter 2, under the category of Personal Interest, I have attempted to reveal my subjectivity, to show where my background experiences and my research might intersect. As my research progressed, I consciously worked to maintain a high level of

awareness of my researcher subjectivity. I understand that it is my obligation as a researcher to maintain a heightened awareness of my personal biases and the ways in which they might influence my research.

Glesne (1999, p. 26) addresses another consideration for my research, what is commonly referred to as “backyard research.” Backyard research refers to conducting studies within the researcher’s home territory, whether it is a workplace, or other familiar setting. Both of the sites where I conducted research were located in the school district where I was employed. In that sense, I was an “insider,” and working in my own backyard. However, in another sense, I remained an “outsider” because I am not a member of the culture that I chose to study.

There were distinct advantages to conducting backyard research: access to a large population of potential participants; the researcher comfort which stems from familiarity with the environment; and the likelihood of obtaining rich data because of my intimate knowledge of the research setting and members of the research community.

I had spent a considerable amount of time across several years moving in and out of the proposed research setting, I had been able to move freely in the schools and surrounding community, including the local parish church and businesses. I had informally observed dozens of transactions among members of this research community: student-student, student-parent, student-teacher, teacher-parent, etc. This gave me the opportunity to develop some tentative hypotheses to pursue more concretely through research, and a context within which I could frame questions.

However, backyard research also brought with it concerns. Participants, and sometimes their parents, were not as open or forthcoming with information because I was

associated with the bureaucracy of the school system. There seemed to be an inherent distrust of bureaucracies within the Vietnamese community. This perception may have been offset in part by the fact that I informed both parents and participants of the purpose of my study, and asked for volunteers to participate. The assurance of voluntary participation was guaranteed, and reiterated, throughout the data collection and final report phases. Participants and their families were advised that they could withdraw consent at any time without penalty. I also assured and reassured participants of the confidentiality of their responses in order to increase their comfort level.

The parish priest agreed to introduce me to his church community and to provide assurance to the parents of participants that this research project was legitimate and worthwhile. In addition, he offered support of the process by volunteering young adults in the congregation to assist in disseminating and collecting the informed consent documents.

Summary

This chapter addressed the research design for this study, basic qualitative research. It described the research question, the research relationship with participants and the key steps in establishing rapport with research participants. Further, it specified the sampling and data collection protocols, as well as focus group discussions as process and individual interviews as process. This chapter provided information about data analysis and the three major components of data analysis: data reduction, data displays, and drawing and verifying conclusions. Trustworthiness was discussed, including credibility, triangulation, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Multiple strategies to support the validation process were outlined.

CHAPTER 4 – RESEARCH PROCESS AND RESULTS

“We can learn, through interviewing, about people’s interior experiences. We can learn the meanings to them of their relationships, their families, their work, and their selves”(Weiss, 1994, p.1).

Overview

The major focus of this study was the perceptions of high achieving Vietnamese American middle grades students regarding factors promoting academic achievement. More specifically, what are the perceptions of low socioeconomic status, high academic achievement Vietnamese middle grades students of the factors within their community and families that have contributed to their school achievement? This chapter describes the study participants, and the themes identified through this research. Data were collected through focus groups and individual interviews for this study across a three-month span: early February to late April, 2004.

Participants

The participants in the study were middle grades students in the school year 2003-2004. Of the 1,869 students enrolled at the two schools selected as research sites, forty-four Vietnamese American middle grades students met the study participation criteria: Vietnamese ethnicity, high academic achievement, and eligibility for free and/or reduced lunch. Ultimately, twenty parents consented to their child’s participation in the study.

Identification of Potential Participants

In identifying potential participants, I was striving for six to eight participants for each grade level focus group, based on a synthesis of information garnered from conversations with my qualitative research methodologist and from other qualitative researchers (Vaughn et al., 1996). While Vaughn, et al (1996) discuss number of participants for focus group discussions, they do not address optimum group size for participants in this age range. I tempered their recommendation of six to twelve adult participants with information from the qualitative research methodologist on my committee who had worked extensively with children in individual interviews and focus group discussions.

Background Information

As part of the consent process, parents were asked to complete a brief demographic survey. Based on the information obtained during that process, I determined that of the twenty participants, fourteen were female and six were male. Seven participants were in the fifth grade; five participants were in the sixth grade; four participants were in the seventh grade; and four participants were in the eighth grade. Six of the participants had been born in Vietnam, while fourteen had been born in the United States (See Table 1).

Table 1 Personal Characteristics of Participants

<u>Pseudonym</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Birth Country</u>
**Trang	Female	6	Vietnam
**Thi	Female	6	United States
**Mai	Female	6	United States
**Bich	Female	6	Vietnam
**Hoa	Female	8	Vietnam
**Kieu	Female	5	United States
**Nhat	Male	6	Vietnam
**Mary	Female	5	United States
**Kim	Female	5	United States
**Truc	Male	7	United States
*Hung	Male	5	United States
*Huy	Male	5	United States
*Thanh	Female	5	United States
*Anh	Female	5	United States
*Kathy	Female	7	Vietnam
*Danh	Male	7	United States
*Tuyet	Female	7	United States
*Duc	Male	8	United States
*Hang	Female	8	Vietnam
*Linh	Female	8	United States

* Focus Group Participant

**Focus Group and Individual Interview Participant

The students' personal characteristics are interrelated to those of their families and their community, and must be considered relative to family and community settings. These characteristics have the potential to influence the community and family expectations of the students. The information provided in Table One is intended to more fully describe the study participants, and to provide additional information about who they are.

Against the backdrop of the demographic information provided by parents, students began sharing their perceptions through a series of focus groups and individual interviews. The data represented by the focus group discussions and individual interviews is presented holistically in this study, rather than sequentially in the order that it was obtained. This representation of data seems more appropriate than a strict chronological parsing out and identification of data by category as either focus group data or individual interview data. The emergent nature of qualitative inquiry, and the fact that many of the themes were evidenced across both focus groups and individual interviews, lend credence to the collating and blending of data by theme, rather than by collection medium, or by grade level of participants.

Expectations

Parental Expectations

Students perceived that good Vietnamese parents expect specific behaviors from their children. Students described working hard in school; displaying respect and discipline; and being aware of the consequences of their behavior relative to goal attainment as some of their parents' expectations. Further, these students spoke of their parents' expectations to establish, pursue, and achieve academic goals.

Hard Work

Students could clearly articulate parents' high expectations for academic attainment. In one narrative after another, students spoke of the multiple messages that their parents conveyed to them regarding their school. There was a litany of encouraging comments that students gave back by rote: "Study hard." "Work harder." "Listen to teachers." "They expect us to get a lot of A's." "Do your best and if I fail, I can do better

on it next time.” Unlike some of the questions that I posed to students in the course of this study, the question, “What do your parents tell you about school?” was rewarded with a barrage of responses, unstemmed by any hesitancy. These students had received and presumably internalized a huge number of messages to help them succeed in school. Students perceived that there was a direct relationship between school achievement and life success.

They just told us to take responsibility for our work, to do work in class, to listen to the teacher. If you work hard right now, then in the future, you can get a better life: be a doctor, a dentist, or whatever you want to be. If you drop your grades right now, then people will laugh at you when you grow up and you will be a trash man, or something like that. You know: no job, homeless. That’s what they told me. (Thi, Grade 6, Individual Interview)

Under the tutelage of their parents, participants had been inculcated with a strong work ethic, in the sense that school was the appropriate “children’s work.” Further, they perceived that failure to achieve academic success could result in catastrophic life results, like being homeless and having no job, as noted by Thi (Grade 6, Individual Interview).

Consequences and Goals

Students clearly articulated their perceptions of parental expectations with regard to school achievement and the relationship that they perceived exists between academic achievement and long-term goals such as going to a higher level in college, getting a good job, and generally having a better life than their parents.

In earlier focus group discussions, students were asked if their parents had told them what they should do in school. Kim (Grade 5) responded, “Get good grades...pay

attention to the teacher...don't get in trouble, because you will get suspended and you will waste some learning time." According to Thanh (Grade 5), "My mom says it very important to pay attention in school so you won't get held back; she told me not to drop out of school, so I could get a very good job and earn lots of money." On the topic of failure to achieve in school, seventh grade focus group members responded in rapid succession noting that: "It could be a problem." "You could be homeless." "You could be a bum."

Just as the students talked about the long-term implications for their academic achievement, they also spoke of the short-term implications. When asked what their parents had said about making grades, students in focus groups responded. Hung (Grade 5) said, "If I get good grades, my mom will send me to buy stuff that I want." Kim (Grade 5) commented, "If I get good grades, my mom will give me a give five dollar bill." At the same time, one informant, Hoa (Grade 8), indicated that when her mother was proud of her school performance, she would take her out to dinner and buy things for her, but when the mother was displeased with her academic performance, "She cut our clothes and she'll hit us and throw our clothes in the street. My momma tell me the only reason that she do that is because she wants to show us that she love us." Other informants indicated that if they failed to make good grades, "They [parents] will ground me and I can't go outside and play for a month" (Mary, Grade 5). Recalling a report card conference where the grades had not met his parents' expectations, Truc (Grade 7) said, "My dad slapped me in the back of my head to teach me a lesson."

Although most students described what might be termed "carrot and stick" inducements, one informant indicated that her motivation was more intrinsic than

extrinsic. Nominally, a “carrot” inducement would be a positive reinforcement with something the child perceived to be desirable; a “stick” inducement would constitute a negative reinforcement, including, but not limited to, physical disciplining. In response to another high achieving student in the focus group discussion who indicated that her mother would buy things for her to reward the attainment of good grades, Kieu (Grade 5) said, “If I get good grades, my mom says the same thing, but I tell my mom I don’t want anything, because I just studied. So that’s how I get the good grades.” (See Figure 1).

Regardless of the expected consequences, both respect and discipline seemed to be recurring themes in these students’ comments.

Respect and Discipline

Students exhibited an unquestioning attitude toward the expectation of parental respect and discipline. Among the students who participated, there was no questioning of parental authority to command respect. There was only minimal question about the need for compliance with parent expectations of behavior. This extended into the school setting, where many students articulated their parents’ expectation of high academic achievement and the affording of respect for teachers as parent-figures.

Summary

All informants in the study were high academic achievement middle grades students. Based on their responses, there appears to be a positive relationship between parental expectations and academic achievement.

Striving for academic achievement was a pervasive and recurring sub-theme throughout the focus group discussions and individual interviews. Additionally,

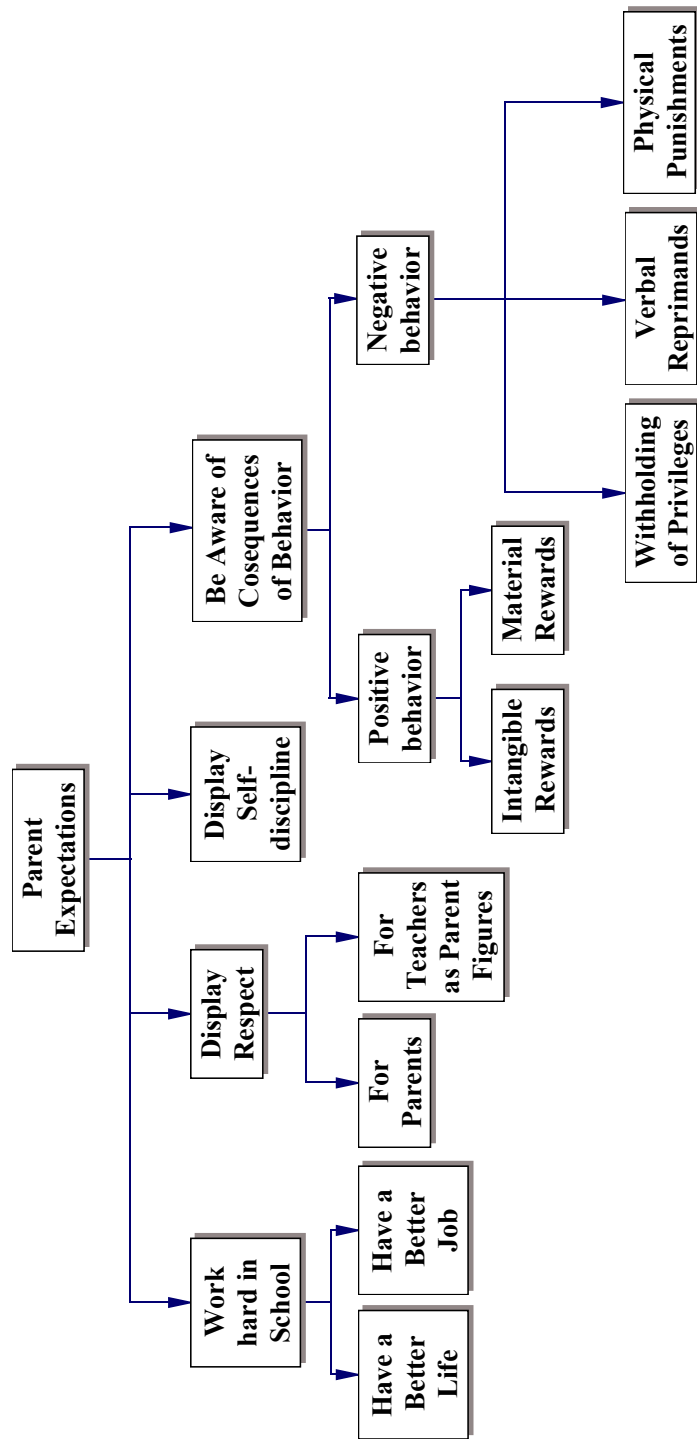


Figure 1. Student perceptions of parent expectations.

informants discussed academic achievement in association with behavioral norms of respect for teachers.

While there were perceptions clearly expressed by the informants that indicated their sense of responsibility to respect and obey elders and teachers, informants also addressed the issue of peer expectations with regard to school.

Peer Expectations

Before entering a discussion of peer expectations, a pertinent question might be, “Who are the peers of the Asian American students who participated in the study?” Given peer pressure issues, it seemed relevant not only to determine what the demographics of the research community were, but also to determine with whom the informants preferentially associated, and whom they identified as their peers.

Demographics of Peer Group

My informal observation that the school population in the school research community was predominantly African American is confirmed by the actual school census by ethnicity. The largest ethnic population is African American, 78% of total school population. The next largest ethnic population is Asian, comprising 19% of the total school population, followed by Hispanic, 1.5%, White, .8%, and American Indian, .1% (New Orleans Public Schools, 2003). Peer group is not, however, determined solely by the distribution of ethnicities in a group, but also by preferential associations.

Preferred Associates

In an individual interview, Hoa (Grade 8) said, “They could be any kind of culture, but I don’t hang out with the bad kids who interrupt the class and make bad grades. I just hang out with the good kids so we could study with each other.” She and

another individual interviewee, Kieu (Grade 5), were the only students who identified any of their friends as being outside their ethnic community. All other students who were interviewed indicated that they “hung out” with all Vietnamese, or Vietnamese American students.

Peer perceptions of school

In individual interviews, students were asked what their friends said about school. “Some of my friends, they really like it because there is nothing to do at home and you get to learn more things at school” (Duc, Grade 8). Some students indicated that their friends thought school was “hard,” and that their friends valued school as a place to “see their friends” (Kieu, Grade 5), or “play with their friends” (Thi, Grade 6). At the other end of the spectrum, Hoa, Grade 8 said, “Oh, to be honest, some of my friends say that school is boring and they hate all the teachers because they don’t know what they be talking about.”

One aspect of school which intersects daily with home and community is the area of homework.

Peer perceptions of homework

Informants’ peers also held widely variant perceptions of homework: They complain a lot of course...homework. Of course they have to do it” (Mai, Grade 6). Trang, (Grade 6) observed, “My friend likes to do homework because at home they don’t really have anything to do, so they can do homework.” (See Figure 2).

While familial expectations and peer expectations are key components in discussing the value systems that potentially impact the academic achievement of

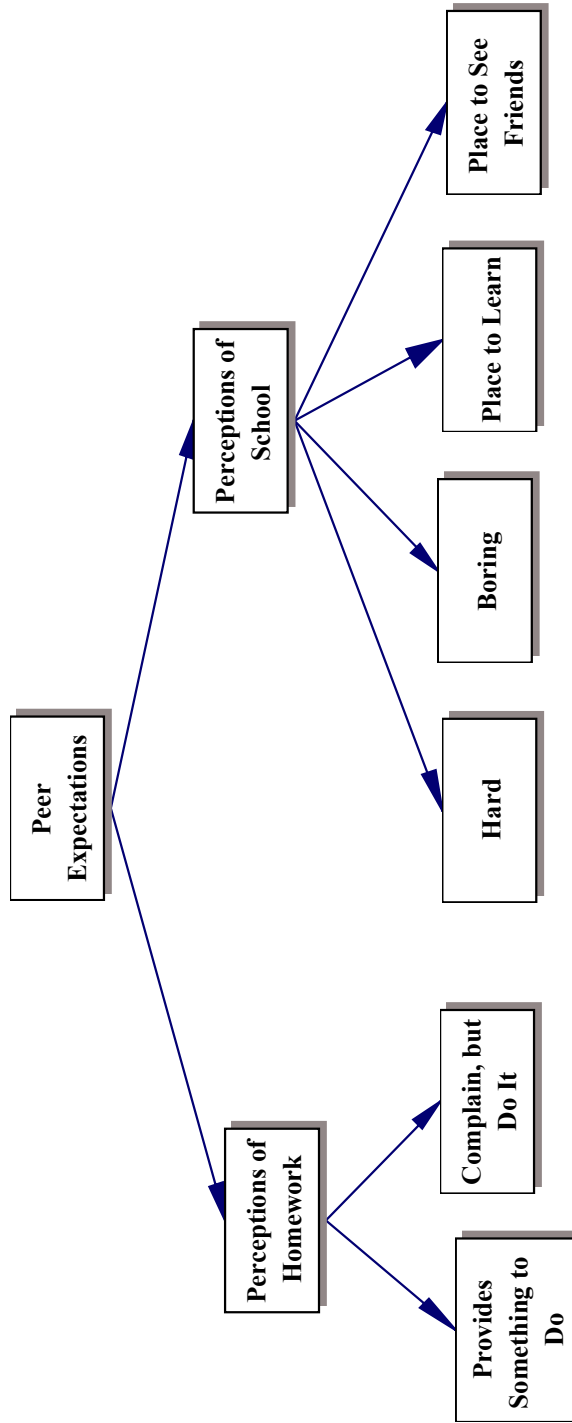


Figure 2. Student perceptions of peer expectations in the context of school.

students in this study, community expectations must also be considered in order to develop a more complete perspective.

Community Influences

The Vietnamese community influences as they relate to academic attainment are manifested in two separate phenomena: academically oriented after school programs and the annual academic awards ceremony sponsored by the Vietnamese Education Association.

After school programs

Within the community, there are a variety of academically oriented after school programs offered to students. The after school programs include Vietnamese studies, English studies, and traditional tutoring/homework assistance. Of the students participating in this study, over half (53%) attended an after school program. As the purpose of the programs varied, so did students' descriptions and narratives of how after school programs fit into their lives.

Student Descriptions

Describing an after school program, one focus group member provided the following narrative:

It's not at the church. It's at a house and they have Sisters and nuns there. They help you with your homework and after your have finished with your homework you go to eat snack and then they teach you new kinds of things you never did before. Like they teach you how to crochet, like make purses or scarves or stuff, or they just do like different kinds of projects on like Valentine's and holidays. And on Wednesday the lady teach us respect and like cosmetics. After that on

Thursday, we can play and stuff cause of all the things we did Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. They drive us home at 5:30. (Mai, Grade 6)

Other focus group members described participating in after school activities in their community: “After school, I go to Vietnamese school and learn about God and you learn about Vietnamese words, but they don’t teach you how to write because they say you’re dumb” (Truc, Grade 7). Trang (Grade 6) added her description, saying:

I go to after school program and I have to do my homework there and then they help me with it if I have trouble. It’s like a church and they have a school there that teaches about God and stuff. You go there and we can do our homework.

All of the after school programs which the informants described had some connection with the religious community, even if religion was not a component of the curriculum. In addition to the students’ descriptions, I felt that it was important to experience the programs firsthand.

Researcher Observations

On several occasions I observed the after school programs at the Catholic Church, Our Lady Queen of Vietnam, located in the research community. Although I intended to observe the program as unobtrusively as possible, when I entered the classroom, the religious Brother who was holding the class called all of the students’ attention to me, and required them to formally greet me, as a group. As I watched the tutoring/homework session from the back of the classroom, I noticed that the students, as they completed each part of their homework, quietly lined up beside the Brother’s desk to have the work reviewed before they moved on to the next part of their homework assignments. One by

one, he checked the work and either approved or disapproved the content and quality of the work

On one occasion, as I was taking notes, I looked up to see an abashed third grade student standing beside me, holding a science workbook. He had been sent to me by the Brother to see if I could read the student's written responses, because the Brother had been unable to decipher the cryptic writing. When I failed to understand the student's written responses any better than the Brother had, I looked to the front of the class to see that the Brother was smiling broadly at me. He then directed his attention to the student and instructed him to erase his answers from the already smudged workbook page and try writing it again.

After the class was dismissed, I spoke with the Brother and asked him about the idea of having the students' work checked not only by him, but also by others. He said that he insisted that the parents also check the homework. When I asked how that would work with numerous parents having limited English proficiency, he said he had taught the parents a small trick: When the child first brings the homework to the parent to be reviewed, the parent is to frown and sternly ask the child if that is his/her best work, and send the child back to improve/perfect the work. That cycle can be repeated as often as the parent thinks is appropriate. The intent was to make the child accountable to the parent for academic performance, regardless of the parent's expertise with English. In a situation where parents might otherwise be disempowered by their lack of English, the power and responsibility for supporting learning are shifted back to the parents by this clever ruse, reinforcing the home-school-community connection. In addition to the

various after school programs, the community supports student academic achievement through an annual academic awards ceremony.

Academic awards ceremony

In the late spring, at the end of the final grading period for the school year, a committee of Vietnamese community members meets. Reviewing grades for the school year, committee members identify Vietnamese students who are to be recognized for their academic achievement at a ceremony to be held in early June. This ceremony is a very achievement-affirming event that reinforces academic achievement for Vietnamese students. Many of the informants in this study had participated in the ceremonies and offered their observations. Danh, Grade 7 focus group member, described his parents' response to his participation in the ceremony: "My parents say, 'I'm proud.' They just proud of me."

Thi (Grade 6), in her role as a focus group member, talked about how it felt to participate in this ceremony recognizing her academic achievement:

It feels good. You are honored to have a trophy. I just came from Vietnam in 3rd grade and in 4th grade I got one, [a trophy] so it pretty much proves honor. It made my parents very happy. My Mom and Dad, they cry a little bit 'cause they are proud 'cause I'm this little and I got a trophy. It made me cry too. I like that time.

The annual awards ceremony sponsored by the Vietnamese Education Association is an overt manifestation of community influences as they pertain to education and student achievement. (See Figure 3).

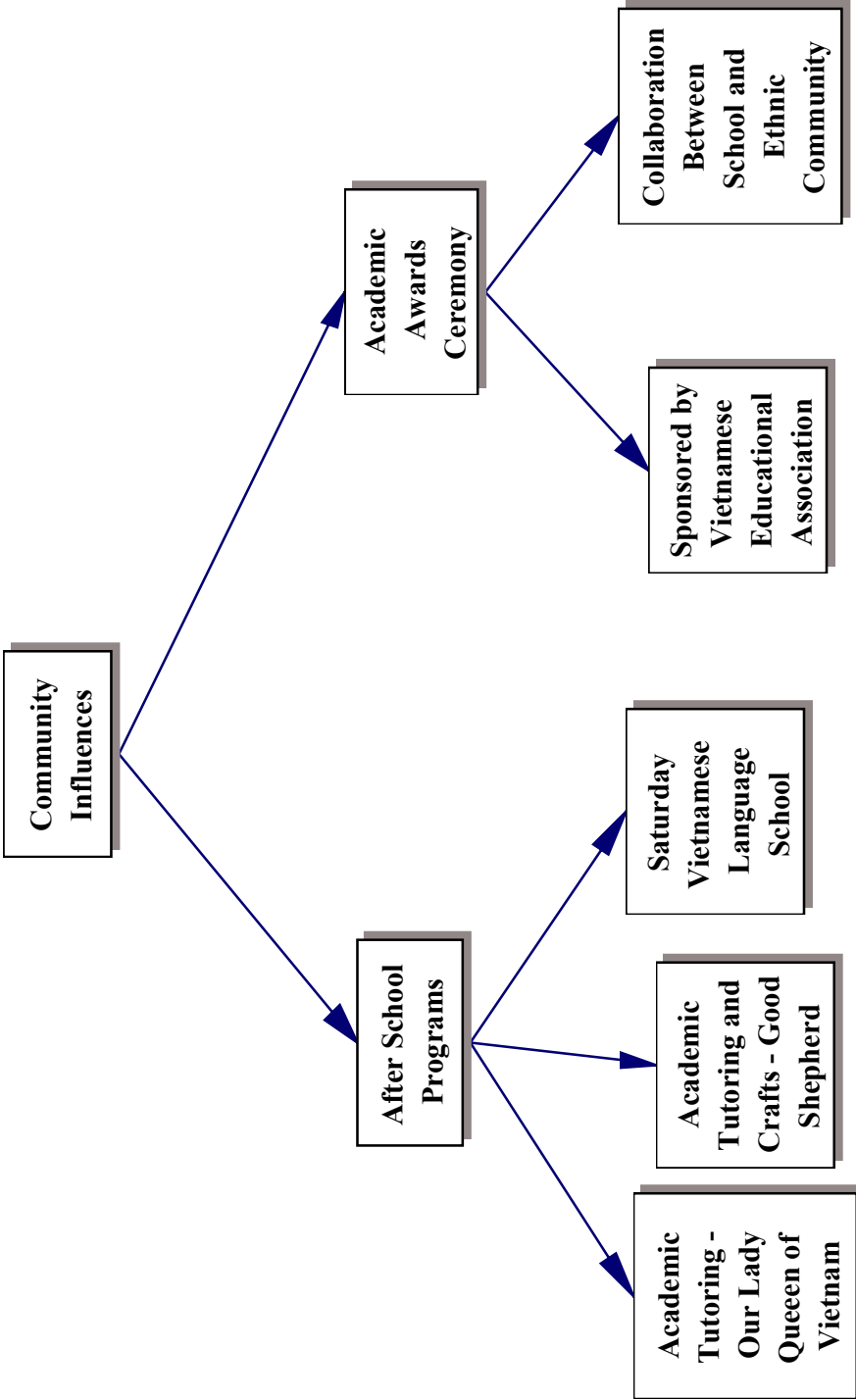


Figure 3. Student perceptions of community influences on academic achievement.

In addition to the themes of familial and community expectations as germane factors in examining student achievement in this research population, preservation of ethnic culture also emerged as an important theme.

Culture

Overview

Several of the questions posed to participants were specifically designed to elicit information about the cultural context in which these students live their daily lives. The responses were both rich and varied. It was clear that they perceived their parents and community as placing great importance on maintaining an ongoing awareness of the Vietnamese culture and in preserving certain culturally based expectations. When contrasting their own culture with others, students were quite animated in their descriptions of ethnic dress and ethnic foods and in their discussions surrounding language and its centrality in their daily life. They also described cultural celebrations (Tet) as being of major importance to their community.

Preservation of Culturally Based Expectations

Respect for Elders

“It’s very interesting, because at home you have to respect your mom and dad and it’s the same, you have to respect the teachers...and do your work to make them proud. That’s what you do” (Nhat, Grade 6, Focus Group).

Students perceived that teachers must be treated with respect, just like their parents. The word “respect” laced through any student discussion involving parents or teachers or proper behavior in a school setting. It emerged like a drumbeat across focus group discussions and individual interviews. Focus group participants associated the

affording of respect and succeeding in school with long-term success: “Like if you respect the teachers and you did good in your school, when you grow up you can have a better future” (Thi, Grade 6).

Maintaining Cultural Identity

“They want us to remember who we are” (Trang, Grade 6 Focus Group).

Indeed, a recurring theme in this study is maintaining the culture of the native country, Vietnam, for successive generations residing in the United States. The extent to which “original” culture is maintained, and therefore culturally based expectations are met, including academic achievement, appears to be related to the degree of assimilation and the generation of the respondents.

Assimilation

The debate about the nature of assimilation of immigrants has been spirited and has shifted across the decades. With regard to immigrants today, Rumbaut (1996) indicates “the incorporation of today's new second generation is likely to be segmented and that different groups will take different pathways to adulthood “(p. 123).

More specifically, Zhou and Bankston (1998) found “Vietnamese families and the ethnic community expect the younger generation to assimilate into the mainstream American culture and to take full part in American society as citizens. Yet, they often use the term ‘Americanization’ in a negative sense” (p. 224). Zhou and Bankston (1998), noted that “the young people described as ‘over-Americanized’ ...are at best, the ones who fail to show proper respect for their parents and elders...” (p. 225). One of the focus group discussion questions prompted by Zhou and Bankston’s findings was, “What does it mean to be ‘too American’?” One of the focus group participants, Kieu,(Grade 5)

responded: “They don’t want us to be too American. They don’t want us to forget our Vietnamese language and what our cultures are for.”

In an individual interview, another informant, Hoa,(Grade 8) indicated:

You got to know your language and your culture in case another Vietnamese person comes up and tries to talk to you and you are like, ‘I don’t understand what you are talking about.’ It is like you are Vietnamese, but you don’t know yourself.

There was a definite association expressed by participants between “being too American” and loss of facility with the Vietnamese language, a conduit for cultural preservation.

One of the school principals in the research community shared with me her earlier plan to offer French language instruction in her school as an accommodation to the school’s large Vietnamese American student population, whose parents had immigrated from a country in which French was widely spoken. She said that, to her surprise, she had been strongly discouraged by members of the Vietnamese ethnic community, who shared with her their perception that French was an elitist language spoken and imposed on the Vietnamese populace by one wave of European invaders of Vietnam (D. Maumus, personal communication, November 12, 2003). This anecdote added to my growing belief that language issues in this community were more complex and potentially greater barriers than I had originally anticipated.

Being too American

In addition to language issues, the focus group discussion with seventh grade students revealed other behavioral expectations arising from families concerned about their children becoming “too American.”

Moderator: to Grade Seven Focus Group: What does that mean, “Being too American?”

Truc: “Like acting Black. They [parents] don’t like you using the rap songs and the curse words.”

Danh: “My Mom doesn’t like that.”

Kathy: “They look at me like, ‘You are a bad child.’ It’s a bad reputation to your family.”

Later, an individual interviewee, Hoa (Grade 8) responded:

Well some Vietnamese parents, they be strict, they don’t want their kids to be like, how to say it, to not make it seem offensive...too American because they don’t want their kids walking out, dressing different and wearing big hoop earrings, their accent all different and stuff like that.

Generally, schools are considered a fertile context for assimilation (LaBelle & Ward, 1994). Assimilation must be considered relative to a particular host population. Participants in this study attended a school where the African American population, at 78% of the total school population, constituted the dominant ethnic population (Orleans Public Schools, 2003). Parental concerns perceived by the above respondent reflect the issue of assimilation to another marginalized ethnic population. (See Figure 4).

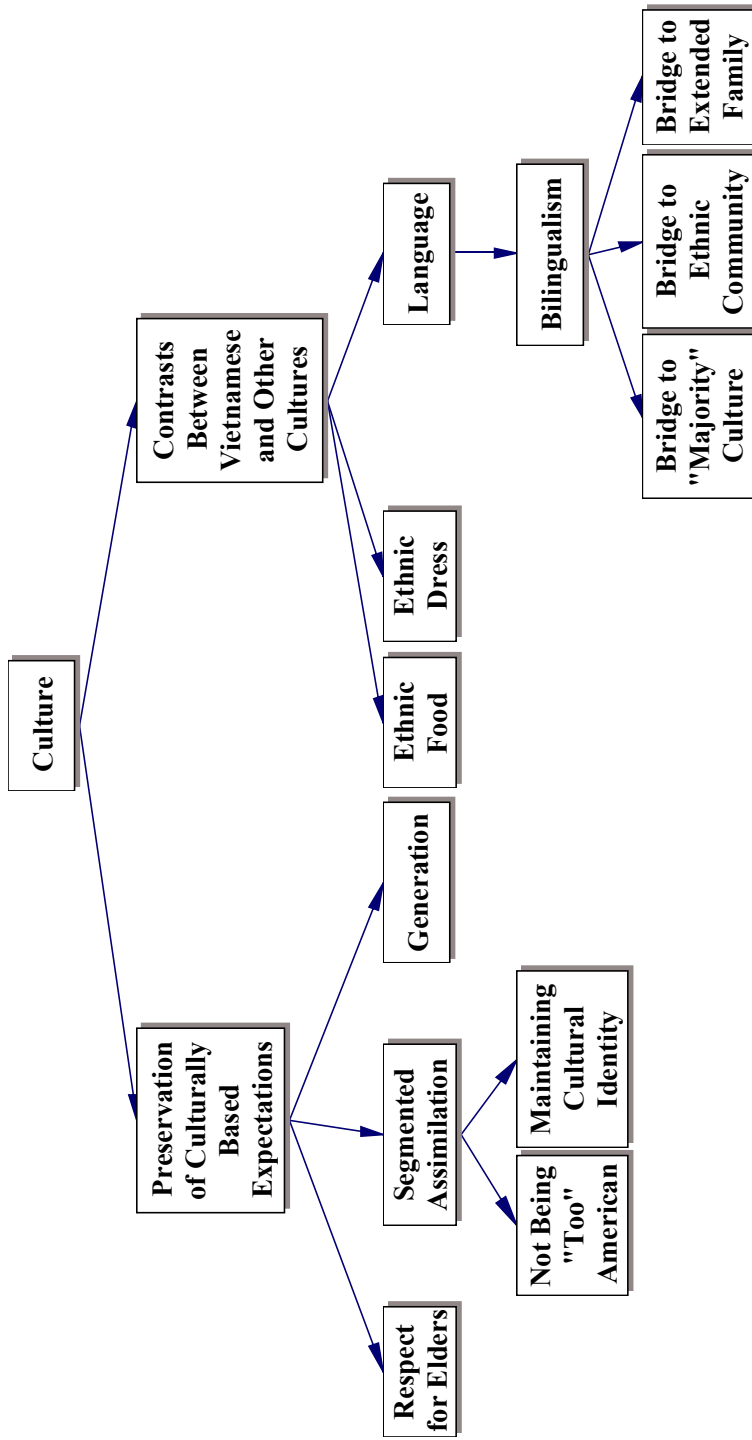


Figure 4. Student perceptions regarding culture and the critical nature of preserving cultural expectations.

Generation

Researchers have developed criteria for describing the generational status of immigrants (Rumbaut, 1996; Zhou & Bankston III, 1998). Using the criteria for identifying generational status, first generation consists of individuals who arrived as adolescents or adults. Generation 1.5 consists of those individuals who arrived between the ages of 5 and 12. Second generation includes those individuals who were born in the United States, or arrived before the age of 5 (Zhou & Bankston III, 1998).

As part of the process of obtaining consent, parents of study participants completed a questionnaire that included information about their country of birth and their child's country of birth. Approximately a third (35%) of the study participants were born in Vietnam, while all (100%) of their parents were born in Vietnam. Using these criteria established by Rumbaut (1996), most (80%) of the study participants can be classified as second generation Americans, while a relatively small number (20%) can be classified as 1.5 generation members. None of the study participants was identified as first generation. (See Table 2). A contributing factor to this dearth of first generation participants may be that the targeted population for this study ranged from age eleven to age fourteen.

Table 2 Generation of Participants

<u>Pseudonym</u>	<u>Generation</u>
Trang	2
Thi	2
Mai	1.5
Bich	1.5
Hoa	2
Kieu	2
Nhat	1.5
Mary	2
Kim	2
Truc	2
Hung	2
Huy	2
Thanh	2
Anh	2
Kathy	1.5
Danh	2
Tuyet	2
Duc	2
Hang	2
Linh	2

Members of the 1.5 generation are sometimes perceived as “straddling two worlds”(Zhou & Bankston, 2000). Respondents in the 1.5 and second generations answered the question, “What is special about being both Vietnamese and being American?” In an individual interview, Trang (Grade 6) said:

Being Vietnamese you can do different things. You don't have to just follow one tradition. You can have another tradition to follow and you can speak another language. You know everybody is just different, so I seem different than others.

Another individual interviewee, Mai, (Grade 6) said:

What's great about is it, you can learn more, you have your own culture, but you also can learn more about the American culture, things like that. And that's what I like about it, 'cause you can actually have your own, the two cultures together.

And what's hardest is [pause] sometimes [pause] making friends, of course. I feel shy 'cause I find it really hard to talk. And you know how I talk. Sometimes friends are kind of harsh about that. It's hard.

Both respondents' comments reflect ambivalence toward the two cultures, Vietnamese and American, existing side by side, in which they participate. They did not feel compelled to be exclusively of one culture or the other, but saw the cultures complementing each other. The comparison of the two cultures led inevitably to a discussion of contrasts as well.

Contrasts between Vietnamese and Other Cultures

As a researcher, I was interested in a wide spectrum of components that potentially defined the perceived uniqueness of the study participants' culture and helped build a more complete picture of the cultural community where the students and their families lived. In focus groups, participants were asked the question, "What is different, or unique, about being Vietnamese?" The respondents interpreted the question variously, in terms of what the point of comparison was with Vietnamese, Hoa (Grade 8) responded: "People assume that we are the same people because of our skin color or

because we almost...you see what I'm saying. But not all of us the same because Chinese different, Vietnamese different, Laos different.”

Bich (Grade 6) used a different reference group for comparison, saying:

What's good about being Vietnamese is I get to learn about Vietnamese. I get to learn about another language and stuff like that, but what is bad about being Vietnamese is you get neglected sometimes from others because they are like, 'Oh, I don't like you because you're not black and all that other stuff.' So, that's bad.

Ethnic Food

“We usually eat... everything we eat Vietnamese food. We eat different type of food than American and just do different things” (Thi, Grade 6, Focus Group).

Study participants identified food as a culture-defining component. On the days of the focus group discussions, I provided pizza and soft drinks for the participants, both as a practical matter to insure that they didn't miss lunch that day because we met during their usual lunchtime, and as a treat for participating. I was concerned, since all of these students qualified for free or reduced lunch that they might not be able to bring a brown bag lunch from home. When I had talked with the seventh and eighth grade students, trying to encourage them to participate in the study, I had mentioned the pizza lunch as an alternative to their bringing a brown bag lunch of their choosing, and was met with a number of positive responses. Accordingly, I assumed that the fifth and sixth grade focus groups would also perceive pizza as positive. My bringing food for them effectively introduced food as a topic for discussion as I watched some of them eye the pizza and only reluctantly help themselves, while others simply declined entirely. I had not intended to make a cultural statement with my choice of food and drink. However, that

was essentially what happened, and proved an invitation to the participants to talk about traditional foods in their homes.

Trying to establish a rapport with the sixth grade focus group, I mentioned that I thought spring rolls were especially fine fare that I had seen and enjoyed at the Tet Fair, but I had no idea how to make them. A discussion about the crafting of spring rolls ensued, with Trang (Grade 6) saying, “My mom teach me how to roll the egg rolls. We can put the two sides together and keep rolling. And keep the two sides closed so they won’t spill out.” Mai (Grade 6) interjected, “Someone hold it in, then we keep folding.” Trang (Grade 6) offered more of an overview of the process, saying,

They get the noodles and they cut up something like ca [spoken phonetically, “gaah,” meaning fish] and put it in the wrapper and they put the noodle in it and they put the shrimp the meat and the vegetables and they roll it up in different way. I don’t know how they roll it up though. And it becomes something like a tube, kind of, to it.

At the end of the discussion, I wasn’t sure how this all tied in to the larger research questions. However, during the course of individual interviews, I asked students, “What do good Vietnamese parents do?” Truc (Grade 7) replied, “Have fun with their children, talk to them. Tell them things, like how to make stuff. When you are older, your mom might teach you how to cook..” Kieu (Grade 5) also responded, “Sometimes they want you to look how they cook so you would know how when you grow up.” The provision of food as well as the passing on of knowledge for preparation of special ethnic foods can be seen as a form of nurturing or parenting, and in this context, a cultural keystone.

Ethnic dress is another cultural factor that visually distinguishes Vietnamese from Americans in this setting.

Ethnic Dress

“We have like a dress, ao dai. We dress different” (Thi, Grade 6).

Moving around this research community during the course of the project, I found it difficult not to notice the distinctive garments. The older generation Vietnamese appeared to wear traditional clothing from their original country on a daily basis. The older men and women alike wore conical straw hats, secured with a tie under their chins. Men wore loose fitting garments, a top and trousers, usually solid colors, that somewhat resembled pajamas. The women wore loose fitting slacks with a dress-like tunic over the top of the trousers, reaching to knee length. On special occasions, such as weddings or the Tet celebration at Our Lady Queen of Vietnam Church, women of all ages wore this stylized tunic and trousers, made of various fine, and embroidered fabrics. This is the garment that the students called an ao dai [phonetic spelling].

Just as dress is an easily noted point of difference between the Vietnamese and others, so, too is the use of the Vietnamese language.

Language

Students perceived that speaking both languages, Vietnamese and English, provided a cultural and generational bridge for them. Because I conducted focus group discussions and interviews in English, the students’ level of competence with spoken English was clear. Further, their high grade point averages and achievement test scores reflected their competence not only with academic subject matter specifically tested, but also with written English. What was less clear at the outset of the study was their

competence with their family's original language. However, the students progressively clarified their competence with the Vietnamese language and the importance of this competence as they talked about the inability to speak Vietnamese as a marker of being "too American." A fifth grade focus group member, Huy, said, "When I was one, two, and three, I speak Vietnamese, but then I kinda' got 'too American' and I forgot how to speak it."

The seventh grade focus group included a spirited discussion among participants where some students very emphatically asserted their ability to speak Vietnamese, as well as two students who quietly said, later in the discussion, that they didn't speak Vietnamese.

Although there were English as a Second Language classes and classrooms at both of the research sites, the schools' expectations were obvious: the students would speak and write in English. By contrast, the majority (80%) of the parents who completed the survey as part of the consent process indicated that Vietnamese was the language most frequently spoken at home. Of the remaining 20%, half of the parents responded that English was the most common language; the other half was unable to identify just one language as the dominant language spoken at home, indicating "English + Vietnamese."

In order to comfortably communicate across generations, these middle grades students needed to be bilingual, speaking primarily Vietnamese at home and English at school. The students' bilingualism formed a bridge between them and their parents and particularly to older members of the extended families. In addition, the students' English competency allowed them to connect their non-English speaking parents to the school

and larger community. In the same way that the students perceived their bilingualism to be a bridging mechanism, they often perceived their parents' monolingualism to be a barrier. When I asked students to tell about the last conversation their parent had with their teacher, a common response was "never." In several instances, the students talked about having to pressure their parents to attend school conferences because the parents were not comfortable speaking English. In those cases where the students served as de facto translators for the parent-teacher conference, there was tacit trust that the student would accurately convey the teacher's message to the parent.

Although many of the study participants referred to their parents' lack of facility with English, most of them responded that their parents went to the school and interacted with the teachers, even if on a limited basis. This interaction was perceived by study participants to be a necessary part of the parent-school relationship, and was deemed a constructive thing, even if there were ultimately negative reports conveyed. Sometimes, the student even had to assume a position of authority to encourage the parent to talk to the teachers. Tuyet (Grade 7) said,

My gifted teacher said she want to talk to my mom and my mom didn't want to go in there, but then I told her she had to. She told her that I was a smart child and I was doing good and I was trying to help people, but they don't want to get help from me.

Students perceive that parents, regardless of their English ability, are communicating with the school and school persons. At the same time, they perceive their own competence in two languages as providing them with an advantage not enjoyed by others who are limited to a single language.

Bilingualism as a Cultural Bridge

“We are very fortunate. We can speak both languages because not all kind of people can understand both languages” (Kim, Grade 5 Focus Group).

According to the questionnaire completed by parents, the majority (80%) of the participants in this study are living in households where Vietnamese is the primary language spoken in the home. Two parents (10%) indicated that English was the primary home language, and two parents (10%) indicated both English and Vietnamese were spoken at home.

When the focus group members were asked, “What language do you speak most frequently at home?” one, Mai (Grade 6) responded: “We mostly talk Vietnamese, but sometimes we talk American.”

One individual interviewee, Thi, (Grade 6) indicated how difficult it was for her to code-switch between the languages:

The hard thing about being an American is that they like the same things as Vietnamese and you get used to talking Vietnamese then when you talk English you find you get tongue twisted because you don't completely know how to pronounce the word.

In many instances, the parents' lack of facility with English was a factor. Members of the Grade 6 focus group responded to questions about dominant home language. One participant, Mai (Grade 6), said, “Talk Vietnamese at home. I don't speak English at home usually because my mom don't speak English. We just come [to the U.S.] and sometime I speak English to my brother and sister.” In fact, some parents

were dependent on their children to serve as translators, as indicated by Thi (Grade 6) in one of the focus group discussions when she talked about her after school routine:

On Friday after school, I went home and I eat and then finish my homework and then that time my mom was home and I have to go to the dentist because she doesn't speak English and I have to help her and stuff.

In several individual interviews, a question was asked to elicit information about the parent-school connection. The question was, "Can you tell me about the most recent time your parents spoke to your teacher?" Nhat (Grade 6) responded, "I think, never, because my parents don't know how to talk English." In another individual interview Trang (Grade 6) responded:

My parents, they don't speak English well. They just, when it's report card conferences, they come get my report card and they talk to my teacher. They ask how am I doing and if I am good. They just talk about me and that's it.

For the participants in this study, there is an implied obligation to learn English as a tool for academic achievement, as well as for long term upward social mobility. However, there is also a perceived obligation to maintain the "original" language as well, as indicated by individual interviewee Linh (Grade 8):

You always have to know how to speak Vietnamese or they will say, "That girl is Vietnamese, but she doesn't know how to speak it." And they would say that she doesn't belong in this country because she doesn't know how to speak our language. That's what some people would say. Like they don't follow the tradition. Some people follow every tradition, but some families don't, and they might say...I can't put it in words.

In fact, there is considerable pressure to either retain or establish fluency in the “original” language, as evidenced by a dialogue that developed in the focus group discussion with seventh grade students. As the researcher, I had worked to make the participants feel more comfortable with regard to language and I was very clear that I had no command of the Vietnamese language and admired and respected their ability to speak both English and Vietnamese. Both to establish a rapport with the participants, as well as to engage in an earnest effort to build a Vietnamese vocabulary, I asked students, “Does everybody have a Vietnamese word they can share with me?” After a considerable silence, the following spirited exchange occurred in the English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom, where the seventh grade focus group met:

Truc: [Gesturing toward Tuyet] She don’t know Vietnamese.

Tuyet: I DO [speaker’s emphasis] know Vietnamese, for your information!

Truc: Information?

Danh: [Pointing to a word in written in Vietnamese on the bulletin board] I don’t know what that word is.

Kathy: I have a word! Em-Aiy [phonetic spelling]

Moderator: What does it mean?

Kathy: Baby!

Based on these participant remarks, there is an expectation that students will not only learn English, but will also maintain their Vietnamese language skills. The accusatory, “She don’t know Vietnamese” elicited a strong response from another focus group member, and prompted two others to scramble to find a Vietnamese word to share in order to validate themselves as speakers of Vietnamese.

In a subsequent individual interview, I asked, “What would happen if you forgot your language?” Thi (Grade 6) said:

If I go to my grandma and grandpa and they say Vietnamese to me, I won’t understand what they say. It would be kind of sad, because then I won’t be able to speak to all of my relatives that only know Vietnamese and they don’t know English.

To the extent that the study participants are bilingual, they serve as a cultural bridge between their often-monolingual parents and the school and the larger community. Additionally, their bilingualism allows these participants to bridge generations. Failure to retain fluency in the Vietnamese language would potentially isolate them from grandparents and other older family members belonging to the extended family.

In some instances, students and their parents provide mutual support in learning English. Thi (Grade 6) commented in the focus group, “My mom told me to study my English because I just came to America three years ago. So I practice [my English] and help her too. I read it and she read after me.”

While language provides a unifying factor within the community, another significant force is the celebration of Tet.

Cultural Celebrations

The Tet Celebration is a major cultural celebration that unifies this Vietnamese community. Although celebrations might seem to be a superficial aspect of a given culture, a large number (89%) of study participants spoke to the topic of celebrations, and the Tet celebration in particular. Focus group discussions on this topic were animated and encompassed lengthy narratives. These narratives described the activities, such as

visiting relatives' homes and some of the customs, such as exchanging good wishes and money in special, lucky red envelopes and having Dragon Dances. One sixth grade student, Trang, (Grade 6) addressed the rationale for the holiday, saying, " We do New Year's differently. And we believe in the Zodiac things. We use animals to tell about our years." The students in this focus group indicated, with one voice, that this was The Year of Monkey being celebrated. The participants acknowledged that Tet was not a unique Vietnamese holiday, mentioning that it was also celebrated in many parts of Asia, including China, Korea, Laos, and Cambodia.

Aside from family gatherings, students described the Tet observances as a secular celebration marked by a fair held on the church grounds, which I also attended. The unique food, the conspicuously Asian participants, and a tent that contained a striking photographic display of recent Vietnam history and notable persons were the main things that distinguished this event from a typical school fair. This Tet Fair had trinket booths, carnival type games, stuffed animals, silly string vendors, and the requisite lively music. However, none of the students mentioned the religious observance of Tet, which was held at Our Lady Queen of Vietnam Church in the context of a traditional Catholic mass earlier that same day. The students did perceive a link between the Catholic Church and the Tet Fair, however. Thi, (Grade 6) said:

It like a time when we forget all our working and all that and just go have fun.

That's the only three days we have for the whole year that we meet together and celebrate something. Just got together, friends join together and have fun. Play gamble and all that. But those money goes to support the church.

Tet is a holiday that is observed in multiple venues, and is significant for its tendency to focus on the cohesiveness of the Vietnamese ethnic community at family, church and community levels.

When asked, “What’s different about being Vietnamese and being American?” one focus group discussant, Kieu (Grade 5), said, “Like if they celebrate different kinds of New Years. Like if you’re American, you celebrate the New Year on January 1, but if you’re Vietnamese, you celebrate the New Years on a different kind of time.”

Another focus group participant, Linh (Grade 8), noted: “For different holidays, for New Years, we get money for it. We do Dragon Dances and stuff like that.” In the context of another focus group discussion, two fifth grade participants dialogued about their experience at Tet this year:

Kim: Like I went to my aunt’s house so we could get that good luck money. I forgot how it’s called in Vietnamese.

Kieu: Lee-see [phonetic spelling]

Kim: Lee-see. They give us some money for good luck and we did some games together and then after that I went home and then my mom took me to the Tet fair and we like bought some stuff. I really wanted a turtle, but my mom said I couldn’t buy a turtle, it bad luck on New Year. So then I bought this spray thingy and I spray some of my friends and stuff and they had a concert there. Well, not really a concert, just regular people singing on the stage.

Data collection for this study began in early February, a few weeks after the celebration of Tet, also known as Lunar New Year. Possibly because of its proximity in time, many of the respondents produced extensive narratives describing the Tet

celebrations when asked about the unique characteristics of their culture. Among respondents, there was an emphasis on the importance of the traditions surrounding the Tet celebration. When asked whether they did the Dragon Dance, one focus group participant, Hang (Grade 8), indicated: “Yeah. For our Vietnamese New Year. It’s a tradition.” In the same focus group, Hoa (Grade 8) responded to a query about the gift monies in the red envelopes, saying, “I just think that it’s part of a tradition because every year, it comes in a red envelope.” Not only was there an emphasis on tradition in participants’ responses, but there was also a clear emphasis on the importance of interacting with extended family as part of the celebration.

Although it is important to understand the general cultural context within which the participants live, it is also important to consider the more intimate context provided by the family.

Family

Family Composition

The family is a potential source of support for children. In particular, family structure is deemed an important factor in children’s educational attainment (Zhou & Bankston, 1998).

I believed, as a researcher and experienced educator, that the students would be more responsive to questions about family structure and power in an individualized setting like that afforded in an individual interview. Accordingly, individual interviewees in this study were asked, “Who lives in your household?” Of the ten individuals interviewed, eight reported that they were living in a household that included siblings and two parents. Only two informants indicated that they were living in a single parent

household with siblings. Furthermore, two of the ten households sheltered extended family as well. Number of individuals per household ranged between four and seven, with five persons being the average per household.

Family Power

The family structure for all families represented in this study is patriarchal with most power residing with the eldest male in the household. To address the issue of power in the families of the informants, during individual interviews I asked the question, “Who is in charge at your house?” Based on this question, greatest power was attributed to the oldest male in the household in six out of ten households, and of these six households, two were presided over by grandfathers. Over half of the students responded that their fathers were in charge, with one respondent, Mary (Grade 5) offering the rationale, “My dad is in charge because he is the one who usually pays for us and like buys the house and pays for the car bills.” They perceived that the power logically belonged to the oldest males because they supplied the money for the household. Accordingly, fathers were most often identified as the individual responsible for disciplining children. This discipline was often meted out, however, after a consultation with the mother.

Students differentiated who controlled the nuclear family from who controlled the extended family. They perceived that the elder males of the family, even if they don't reside in the same household, have power over the extended family. In an individual interview, Mai (Grade 6) said, “My mom and my dad, my sister and my brother and I, that's the little family, but my grandfather is like the whole, whole family head.”

Typically, power was perceived to devolve downward from father to mother to eldest child if there was an emergency. Study participants perceived that their fathers were largely in charge of the household, but also acknowledged that their fathers were often at work. If a father was at work when a decision had to be made, or an emergency arose, the mother made a decision. If both parents were away, and there were no other adults in the household, the eldest child was responsible. In the instances where study participants took the decision tree down to the sibling level, they identified the oldest daughter as the responsible person. Family roles were also clearly assigned.

Family Roles

To establish roles within the family, I asked in individual interviews, “Who is in charge of what at your house?” The responses varied, but in general followed traditional gender roles. Kieu (Grade 5), responded, “My dad, his money, he works, he usually pays for the house rent and my mom, her money, she work, she goes to the store and gets things that we need like our clothes or our shoes and books.” Another informant, Bich (Grade 6), added her perceptions:

My dad is usually in charge of fixing the house if it gets broken, and my mom, she cleans up whatever mess that we make. My dad usually goes to the back and he tries to fix up his tools so he could fix up the house. My mom usually goes in the back and plants a garden.

As previously noted, family matters that required disciplinary action, according to two informants, devolved to the father of the family. Nhat (Grade 6), mentioned:

He go to work and brings money home so to pay the bills and my mom as well. That's the thing I know about my mom because that's the only thing she do in the family and my dad he works, he bring us to school and he always show discipline.

Mai (Grade 6) noted:

My dad is in charge of the house, so usually every time we make mistakes, if my mom knows she tells my dad, so he is the one who makes the punishment. He is the one in charge of it.

One individual interviewee was able to put the roles of her nuclear family in the larger context of the extended family. Mai (Grade 6) said,

We went to my grandfather's house to celebrate Tet because he is the head of the family... but that's the whole, whole, whole family, which is ten and eleven people. But our little family, the brothers and sisters is like that, so my sister is the oldest, and then me, and my brother. So my sister has to take responsibility for all of us, and my brother and I have to listen to her. My mom and my dad, my sister and my brother and I, that's the little family, but my grandfather is like the whole, whole family head.

To further explore the participants' perceptions of roles in the family, I posed the question to individual interviewees, "What do good Vietnamese parents do?" Kieu (Grade 5) responded:

They teach you. Sometimes they want you to look how they cook so you would know how when you grow up. If you are bad, they won't hit you, but they will just send you to your room. But bad Vietnamese parents hit you because I seen one of my friend's Vietnamese parents hit her because she messed up the cement that the landlord fixed.

In response to this question, Mai (Grade 6) indicated:

Good Vietnamese parents usually support their child and help me on learning even though my mom and dad don't speak English. They help me on my work, but I can explain some of my work to them and they can help me on part of it so that I can understand and they just give me advice on work and help me on it.

All respondents to this question associated good parenting with some aspect of learning, whether it was traditional learning in the school setting, learning cultural keystones such as cooking native foods, or learning behavioral norms. As Mai (Grade 6) noted, even parents who are not bilingual strive to participate in the learning process for their children.

Family Structure

The majority (80%) of the families represented in this study were intact, i.e., two parent families. I explored the structure of the family through individual interviews. In this context, seven of the ten students interviewed identified theirs as being a traditional two-parent family. Only one student indicated that her father didn't live with the family. All students had siblings living in the household. Three students specified that extended family, such as grandparents, also resided in the household. One student indicated that that her grandfather was not only living with her family, but was also serving as head of household in the absence of her father.

In early conversations with school persons at the research site, I learned that there were strong sanctions against divorce arising from the religious community. This rule was, in fact, so rigid that even a Vietnamese woman on the school staff who was in an

abusive marriage was strongly discouraged from considering divorce (D. Maumus, personal communication, September 15, 2003).

Family Support

Students' perceptions of one factor, family support, which might contribute to their academic success, were explored by looking at one nexus between home and school, homework. Individual interviewees were asked, "Who helps you with learning in your household?" Three respondents shared that their sisters helped them; one indicated that her mom helped her; one noted that her mom and her sister helped, and two mentioned that their brothers helped them with homework. One respondent indicated that there was also some familial academic help, which came from the extended family.

Of the three respondents who indicated that their sisters provided help with homework, Trang (Grade 6) said, "Mostly my sisters. They explain it to me and sometimes they just give me the answers." Mai (Grade 6) said, "Mostly my sister. She learned something already, so she knows more than me, so she puts details on it so she can help me more. She help me a lot, I guess." Mary (Grade 5) said, "My sister. She is a teacher at the Catholic school, so she helps me do my homework."

Two respondents indicated that their brothers helped them with homework. Truc (Grade 7) responded, "No one. Well, my brother helps me sometimes [pause] but rarely." Nhat (Grade 6) said, "My brother, because my sister, she don't know a lot and sometime I do it by myself. When I have a hard question, I ask my brother."

Kieu (Grade 5) said, "Sometimes my mom. I usually don't need help because I understand my schoolwork well." On the other hand, Kim (Grade 5) said, "My mom and

my sister. They help me when I don't understand and they repeat it for me and test me on the work we are about to have a test on."

When asked about sources of help for learning within the household, Thi (Grade 6) said, "Not in my house, but my older cousin, she usually comes to my house and helps with my homework if I don't understand it."

In general, siblings were deemed more likely sources of direct academic support, such as homework assistance, than parents. On the other hand, parents were perceived to provide more overarching forms of support, such as assuring attendance at a good school and establishing expectations for academic attainment.

"My mom and dad always send me to a good school that can teach you well, but if they can't find a public school that can teach well, they send me to private school," Thi (Grade 6) said.

"[Parents] help us do things like on projects. If you need things, they can help us get it. Give us some money for the things that we need, like books," Mary (Grade 5) observed.

Students' perceptions of family-based factors that have contributed to their achievement are critical to this study. However, these factors must also be considered in the larger context of community.

Community

Religious Community

Over half (53%) of the students who responded to question, "Where do you go after school?" answered that they went to a tutoring program sponsored either by the Our

Lady Queen of Vietnam Catholic Church, or they went to another tutoring program sponsored by other Catholic religious groups in settings like The Good Shepherd Home. Of the students who did not respond affirmatively about attending a formal after school tutoring program, 80% indicated that they went “straight home” to do homework. The remaining 20% did not respond to the question at all in the course of the focus group discussions.

There didn’t seem to be any question that the first order of business after school was doing homework; it was just a question of where that would be accomplished. Notably absent was any discussion of student-centered non-academic activities after school like sports or music lessons. Some students were, however, expected to assist their parents after school by translating for important interactions in the English speaking community, such as doctor appointments. Thi, (Grade 6 Focus Group) said:

On Friday after school, I went home and I eat and then finish my homework and then that time my mom was home and I have to go to the dentist because she doesn’t speak English and I have to help her and stuff.

Another example occurred as I was canvassing parents at home for their consent. One student who was a prospective study participant met me at the door of her home and conducted the entire transaction with me, only pausing in her banter with me and by turns, her parents, while her father actually signed the consent form.

Based on student responses in both focus group discussions and individual interviews, students could obtain homework assistance either through an organized entity such as the local Catholic Church, Our Lady Queen of Vietnam, or through a combination of the local Catholic Church and various family members.

Of the students who indicated that they went home to do homework, all but two students had some help from their parents, brothers, or sisters in completing homework. One of these students, Nhat, Grade 6, was a latchkey child in a family with little English competence. The other student, Hoa (Grade 8), was also on her own with regard to homework. Living within a family with low English fluency and being the oldest child in the family left her particularly strapped for resources to complete school assignments. With regard to homework she noted, “ I do it by myself because nobody in my house understands English really well and I’m the oldest, so I don’t get help. I do it by myself.” With the exception of these two students, the participants in this study enjoyed the support of their families or their church community to complete their academic work. This academic support constitutes a form of social capital, manifested as several parts of Epstein’s (1997) parent involvement typology, “parenting,” and “collaborating with community.”

After school programs are academically focused, but may include training and/or craft activities. Even the students who did not participate in daily tutoring sessions had the expectation of going to Our Lady Queen of Vietnam Church at least once a week to receive religious training, offered in Vietnamese. The classes were divided according to age groups. Truc, Grade 7, Focus Group said:

They have different classes. Thursdays it’s ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade and on Fridays it’s sixth, seventh, and eighth, and Saturdays are little kids: first, second, third, fourth.

Secular Community

With regard to the secular community, students perceived that the broader Vietnamese community, including the embedded religious community, provided support for their academic achievement.

As previously described, the Vietnamese ethnic community, as represented by the Vietnamese Educational Association, holds recognition ceremonies every year, at the end of the school term, to acknowledge the academic achievement of Vietnamese students. In earlier research in this same community, Zhou & Bankston (1998) noted that “the ceremony, attended by most of the neighborhood's residents, serves as a strong formal affirmation of accomplishment” (p. 106).

Study participants affirmed their awareness of the annual ceremony. They spoke, with varying levels of candor, about the annual awards ceremony sponsored by the Vietnamese Educational Association, which positively reinforced academic achievement of Vietnamese students in a very public setting at the end of every school year. At this ceremony, students were awarded trophies as tangible rewards for their academic achievement. Students perceived that the ethnic community valued their achievements.

Many of the younger participants in the study, in grades five and six, spoke extensively about their experience as participants in the ceremony, and how proud their parents were of them. Older participants were less willing to acknowledge the ceremony or talk about their participation. The following dialogue from the seventh grade focus group illustrates this reluctance:

Moderator: There are some Vietnamese parents who meet. They have an awards ceremony. I thought some, maybe not all of you, might have participated.

Tuyet: I think I did, but I don't know.

Moderator: So, you went to one like that? What was it like?

Tuyet: It was boring.

Moderator: It was boring? Did you get an award?

Tuyet: Yes, I got a trophy.

Moderator: A trophy for...

Tuyet: For the GPA.

Although the students in the seventh grade focus group appeared to know about the academic awards ceremony, based on their nods and body language, only one seventh grade student, Tuyet, was willing to talk about her experience.

Community Environment

The term “neighborhood” was used to elicit information about the specific subdivision or housing development in which the students lived. The overall “community” was comprised of a patchwork quilt of neighborhoods in which the Vietnamese population might or might not be the dominant ethnicity. In individual interviews, participants in the study were queried, “How would you describe your neighborhood?” If participants did not respond, initially, to this question, I probed, “If I were to go to your neighborhood, what would I see?” Truc (Grade 7) responded:

You would see two big houses next door, and the rest are small houses, regular style, and you would see some police cars next to the houses. You would see some kids riding electric scooters and those four wheelers and ATVs.

In another interview, (Grade 6) said:

It would be a lot of houses like a white and new built ones and a church and crooked roads. And signs and sometimes, there is burnt cars around because there are teenagers around and they burn a car a lots of times. I saw one. It was just around the grass and my dad's car got stolen once, but we found it around the church. Someone left it there.

Some participants described multi-family dwellings in their neighborhood:

Like it's kind of like there are apartments on that side and then my house is a big two story house and there are more two story houses and the apartments, they have African American people who live in there and the other two story houses, they are Vietnamese people. I don't know because I usually stay inside. (Kieu, Individual Interviewee, Grade 5)

Nhat (Grade 6) also described his community, which included multi-family dwellings, saying:

My neighborhood, people rent houses. My family, my mom buy houses, so my mom let... my house got two rooms, one is for my family to live and my mom let other people rent the other side of the house.

The individuals and groups who populate the neighborhood are important, and are perhaps more critical aspects of the community than the architectural structures.

Community Members

“They are very kind and nice and helpful. They are a mixture of African American and Vietnamese.” (Kim, Grade 5, Individual Interview)

Participants who were selected for individual interviews were asked, “Who are the people in your neighborhood?” Another respondent reinforced Kim’s (Grade 5) earlier description of the ethnic composition of her neighborhood. Thi (Grade 6), said, “Most of the people are Vietnamese, but then they have some African American around it.”

Some respondents expanded on the direct question, and chose instead to comment on the quality of the environment in their neighborhood. Mai (Grade 6), said:

I would choose ‘quiet’ to describe my neighborhood. Quiet, silent because every time my mother and I walk around, it’s pretty silent, you don’t see neighbors, like outside singing or anything, very quiet, silent. You don’t see people walk out or drive their car to go out often. They are usually inside.

In dramatic contrast to the quiet neighborhood described above, Mary (Grade 5) noted, “[My neighborhood] is just kind of scary sometimes. There is a lot of people going around and they were like robbing houses and stuff sometimes.”

Nhat (Grade 6) provided yet another contrasting description of his neighborhood:

There are a lot of black people driving the cars around and they sit in the street... not in the street, but on the side and play that music that is very loud. So every time at night, next to my house, they keep playing that music and my family can’t sleep. I keep hearing that noise.

The students who participated in this study saw their neighborhoods with one set of lenses. As an outsider observer, I saw their neighborhoods with different eyes. Armed with home addresses from the student database in the school district, I walked door to

door to obtain parental consent for students to participate in the study. The prospective study participants lived in neighborhoods heavily patrolled by municipal police. In fact, residents and others noticed my presence as an outsider as I moved through the community. What I first thought was a series of coincidental encounters with police patrol cars developed into an unmistakable pattern of being followed and observed. When I commented later to one of teachers at the school in the research community about this experience in the neighborhood, she speculated that my presence had aroused suspicion because of a history of outsiders coming into the neighborhood to deal drugs.

As a grace note to this experience, one participant, Kim (Grade 5) in responding to the question about who lives in her neighborhood aptly remarked, “They are nice. They are helpful, and they watch each other houses in case of dangerous comes.”

While there were some disparities in the perceptions of study participants about the qualitative differences in their neighborhoods and the people in them, there was a clearer consensus about what their activities were in the community after school hours.

After School in the Community

In focus group discussions, study participants were asked, “Tell me step by step what you did after school yesterday, from school time to bed time.” Participants responded with narratives, describing after school regimens:

After school I go to my after school program and I do all my homework. After I do my homework, I do crochet. After crocheting we do this little program for our group and it is Ms. Cindy’s group, and then about 5:30 we go home. Sister drive us home. (Kieu, Grade 5)

First I go home and then I do my homework. After I do my homework my uncle makes me something to eat and then me and my cousin we go outside to do something. To ride bikes, but if it is raining, we just stay in our shed and talk. (Huy, Grade 5)

After school I go to a program and then do my homework and if I finish early like we do a puzzle and challenge each other and stuff. And then, after that we have snacks and then we do arts or crafts and stuff. On Wednesday, this lady come named Christy and Thursday we have free time after that. Then after that, they drive us home and then when I get home I go eat dinner. Then I play with my dog, and then I take a shower and then brush my teeth and go to sleep. (Kim, Grade 5)

Thanh (Grade 5) said, “After school I go to the program until 4:30. Then I’ll go home. I watch TV for a little bit, and then I eat. Then I take a shower, then I go sleep.”

Participant responses were binary: either the students immediately went home after school, or they attended one of several after school academic programs offered in the community,

No discussion of research results in a qualitative study is complete without some consideration of researcher subjectivity issues.

Researcher Subjectivity

Because the qualitative researcher becomes the “instrument” for gathering data, it is necessary, in the process of considering findings, to account for researcher subjectivity. As the researcher, I came to this research project with some preconceived notions that had the potential to bias the data gathering process as well as the data analysis process.

Previous positive classroom experience with Asian American students predisposed me to view them through the lens of the “model minority” even before I began this inquiry. For example, I grappled from the outset with the construction of the research question, thinking in terms, first, of what factors had contributed to the participants’ “academic success,” a positively biased term, instead of the more neutral “academic achievement” language which appeared in the refined research question just prior to the outset of data collection. Academic achievement could be attained, or could fail to be attained, whereas “academic success” implied the inevitability of attainment. Conversations with peer reviewers were very helpful in my struggle to objectify the language and my posture toward the research project and its participants.

This embedded bias also colored the questioning process. For the present research project, the construction of question guides was an evolutionary process that occurred across several months, from November 2003 to February 2004. The prompts for developing the focus group questions were, “What do I want to know?” and “What attributes am I aware of through literature review and observation?” The questions were formulated and reformulated with feedback from seasoned researchers before either focus group discussions or individual interviews were conducted. However, there is a very fine line between constructing focused question guides which will net responses relevant to the research question, and constructing question guides that are so narrowly focused that they, or the spin-off probes arising from them, might be conceived of as “leading” questions. There is always the issue, particularly with novice researchers such as myself, as to whether the line has been crossed between focused questions and leading questions.

A review of the first focus group transcript with a qualitative research methodologist was helpful in establishing a dialogue about the participants' responses and possible ways to probe subsequent groups of participants to gather richer data. The methodologist encouraged me to think more about areas of interest as identified on the question development matrix such as family, community, school, and culture, and less about specific questions that had grown out of the identified areas of interest. A review of the second focus group transcript with peer reviewers was instructional and helpful in identifying question/answer sequences in which I, as the researcher, had interjected my own language to summarize participant responses and in effect, or led the participant responses in a particular direction. As a result of these dialogues, I was more cognizant of the ways in which I might bias responses, and through this awareness, endeavored to be more "transparent" in my role as moderator of focus groups and interviewer of individual research participants.

Summary

This chapter detailed the process of obtaining parent permission and selecting participants for focus group and individual interviews. In particular, expectations of parents and peers, as well as the influence of community were discussed by participants. Family emerged as a major theme in this study through the discussion of participants. This chapter included participants' perceptions about family composition, family power, family roles and structure, and support available from the family. Culture is another theme that was explored through participants' perspectives, including preservation of culturally based expectations, cultural celebrations, and contrasts between Vietnamese and other cultures. Community provided the context for the study, and was discussed in

terms of participant's perceptions of religious and secular communities, community environment, community members, and after school activities in the community. In order to clarify the potential for researcher bias, researcher subjectivity was discussed.

CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSIONS

Overview

This study investigated the perceptions of low socioeconomic status, high achievement Vietnamese American middle grades students of the factors within their community and families that have contributed to their school achievement. Using a basic qualitative study comprised of focus groups and individual interviews, I explored the perceptions of study participants. Twenty Vietnamese American students in two middle grades schools, located in a large urban area in the southern region of the country were chosen to participate in this study. The students who participated in the study were eligible for free or reduced lunch, and were high academic achieving students in grades five through eight. The findings suggest that the nuclear family, inclusive of parents, as well as extended family and the social capital that accrues to the family through relationships in the ethnic community play an essential role in the academic lives of these students. This chapter will present a brief overview of this study, including a discussion of the factors that affected school performance for study participants.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the question, “What are the perceptions of low SES, high academic achievement Vietnamese middle grades students of the factors within their communities and families that have contributed to their school achievement?” As noted earlier, research indicates that student achievement and parental involvement are positively related (Bempechat, 1999; Clark, 1983; Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999). Accordingly, semi-structured interview guides were designed

to elicit responses regarding student perceptions of the factors arising within their families and community that might contribute to their academic success.

The conceptual framework used in the present study was social capital. In this study, social capital was defined as a component of family background, when taken in the educational context of examining student achievement. Social capital exists in the relationships among people (Coleman, 1988). According to some researchers (McNeal, 1999; Zhou & Bankston, 1996) parents' involvement in their children's educational processes is a form of social capital. Participants in this study did not use language that encompassed the words, "social capital." However, they did describe a constellation of parental expectations and activities that constituted parental involvement in support of their school achievement. It was useful, then, to consider data collected against the backdrop of the relatively comprehensive parental involvement conceptual framework developed by Epstein and Connors (Epstein & Connors, 1992). This six-part typology includes parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with community.

Methods and Procedures

Appropriate school district and university authorities granted me permission to conduct research. Vietnamese parents signed consent forms for their children to participate in the study, and completed a brief demographic survey providing background information. Consenting students participated in focus group discussions in the target schools. The proceedings of each focus group were recorded on audio-tapes and field notes were written at the conclusion of each focus group. I analyzed each of the focus group transcripts, coded the data, and noted emerging themes in the margins of the

transcripts. I developed conceptual displays to facilitate cross-case analyses and to clarify emerging themes that either cut across focus groups, or were different across focus groups. Based on review of the focus group transcripts, analysis with peer reviewers, and review of the conceptual displays, I identified focus group members who would be asked to participate in an individual interview. For each of these prospective individual interviewees, I developed a matrix to determine if there were any emergent thematic areas where a particular participant had not evidenced a response. Through this process, I identified specific questions that needed to be introduced in the individual interview process for each participant. This was done in order to achieve a more complete picture of his or her perspectives.

Analysis Process

In accord with best practice described by Miles and Huberman (1994), I did preliminary coding of each transcript before conducting the next focus group discussion or interview. Some of the codes used to describe themes in the first transcripts were affirmed by recurrence in later transcripts; some of the codes and corresponding themes were set aside as being “outliers” that only appeared once, or in isolation. This refinement continued throughout the data collection process, and seemed to be congruent with the emergent nature of qualitative research.

From the twenty students participating in the focus group discussions, ten students participated in individual interviews. Each of these ten students completed at least one interview; three of the ten students selected for individual interviews completed two interviews. In order to insure accuracy, I tape-recorded the individual interviews. I compared each transcript to the original tape recording after the transcription was

complete. The reviewed transcripts were coded, and checked either for redundancy of themes or emergence of new themes against the conceptual displays I had developed for the focus group discussions. Through the conceptual displays, it became clear that a number of major themes had emerged: culture, community, family, and expectations. In turn, each theme manifested supporting sub-themes, which eventually distilled into findings.

Findings

Factors Influencing Student Achievement

Previous researchers (Alexander & Entwisle, 1996; Bierman, 1996) have found that there was a positive relationship between socioeconomic status (SES) and student achievement, and that the tendency was for the disparity in school performance between high and low socioeconomic student groups to increase over time. This study, however, focused on individuals who, despite a low SES, were performing at a high level of school achievement. Despite the low SES of participants, as indicated by eligibility for free or reduced lunch, students in this study earned grades which placed them at or above the 3.0 grade point average. While SES may be an important factor in academic achievement, other factors also exercise significant influence.

This study found that maintenance of ethnic culture was a positive influence on student achievement. This parallels the findings of Alva (1993) who found that socio-cultural factors were a primary consideration in student achievement, and Lee (2001) who found that there was a one-to-one relationship between the maintenance of traditional culture and high achievement. Among participants in the study, 15 students articulated the perception that maintenance of their ethnic culture was important, as

evidenced by cultural celebrations, the prevalence of ethnic food and dress, and the study of Vietnamese language. In addition to cultural factors, Sue and Okazaki (1990), indicated that the academic achievement of Asian Americans is “highly influenced by the opportunities present for upward mobility”(p. 917). Although students in the middle grades are unlikely to use the expression, “upward mobility,” several participants in this study perceived a direct relationship between their academic success and “having a great future” or “a better life.” Nhat, Sixth Grade, said his parents “Tell me that you go to school and learn and in the future have great career.”

In summary, study participants voiced their perception that maintenance of their ethnic culture, as manifested in cultural celebrations, ethnic food and dress, and the study of the Vietnamese language, was important. Participants in the present study perceived a direct relationship between their present and ongoing academic effort and having good prospects for their future. Students perceived that the preservation of cultural traditions within their community and their persistent efforts at scholarship contributed to their school achievement.

Minority Parent Involvement and Student Achievement

This study found that participants perceived that their parents cared about their academic achievement. Similarly, Bempechat (1999) found that Asian students perceived their parents cared about their education, positively influencing math scores. While there was no perception voiced that parental involvement influenced them to seek attainment in a particular subject area, the majority of the participants in this study said that as “good Vietnamese parents,” their parents encouraged them to attain academic goals. Parents provided verbal and material reinforcement for academic achievement. At

the same time, some of the students in this study indicated that there were parental sanctions, some severe, for failure to perform: physical disciplining as well as withdrawal of privileges.

Clark (1983) asserted “it is the family members' *beliefs, activities, and overall cultural style*, not the family units' composition or social status, that produces the requisite mental structures for effective and desirable behavior during classroom lessons” (p. 2). Participants in the present study affirmed their knowledge of their parents’ belief systems as they pertained to school and behavioral norms. None of the students who responded to the question, “What do your parents tell you about school?” voiced any ambiguity about their parents’ expectations with regard to education. Although many of the parents of students in the present study gave their children overt messages with regard to academic achievement, Huy, a fifth grade focus group participant, conveyed the parental message most succinctly saying, “Listen to teachers, study hard, remember to ask the teacher what we do, and then we go home, she tells us: study, study.” This data speaks to a key aspect of the research question that defined the present study, regarding what students’ perceptions are of the factors within their families that contributed to their school achievement. According to participants in this study, one factor in their academic achievement stemming from their family was the pervasive and persistent parental encouragement to achieve academically.

Model Minority Concept

This study found that the model minority concept was a factor in student achievement. While the student participants in the present study did not articulate a position on the “model minority” issue, teachers in the schools from which the

participants were drawn were very clear regarding their desire to have Vietnamese American students in their classrooms. In informal exchanges with these teachers as I worked to validate myself and the research project in their schools, these teachers spoke very candidly, saying that they perceived Vietnamese students were respectful of teachers and the learning environment, and that they were typically high-achieving students.

In other studies which addressed the issue of Asians being touted as the “model minority,” researchers (Wong et al., 1998), found that Asian Americans believe they are more prepared, motivated and are more likely to succeed than whites, while Lee (1996) found in a study of high school students that Asian students attempted to live up to the standards of the model minority stereotype. Their striving to maintain the stereotype was based on their understanding of their relative social positions inside and outside their school setting, and on their desire to gain acceptance and respect from the dominant group (p. 116). In fact, when participants in the present study were asked what their parents told them about school, several chose specifically to talk about respect, and why teachers must be respected. Mai, a sixth grade focus group participant said, “Because they are adults and we are just little kids and we have to respect them and obey them.” Hence, the students were functioning in school settings where the prevailing expectation was that the Vietnamese students had the potential to fulfill the “model minority” stereotype, and the students themselves were often arriving at the school site imbued with family expectations of respect for educators and learning, one component of the “model minority” stereotype.

The “model minority” concept introduces, by lateral arabesque, another issue resident in this research: an outsider’s perspective which erroneously, and by default

perpetuates another racial/ethnic stereotype: “All Asians look [and act] alike.” The academic successes of Asian Americans are reflected in popular press by the comments like those of Mike Wallace of CBS's *60 Minutes*, “They must be doing something right. Let's bottle it”(Wallace in Takaki, p. 474). In this observation, “they” represents Asian Americans as a cohesive group with a single identity. Yet this single identity, or “panethnicity” is not always chosen by Asian ethnic groups, but rather is often imposed by members of the dominant group (Lee, 1996, p. 114). One of the pitfalls in researching a subcategory of Asian Americans, such as Vietnamese, is the tendency of Westerners to generalize data about Asians from one subgroup to another. In an emotional exchange, one of the participants in the present research project, Hoa (Grade 8), responded to a question about what is unique about being Vietnamese, saying,

I just don't like people comparing us to Chinese people because we our own people, and you supposed to respect that and you shouldn't compare us to nobody else because everybody is individual! The Chinese people got them weird eyes.

In the present research project, then, as with Lee's (1996; 2001), there is clear resistance to being arbitrarily grouped with other Asian Americans, even if the grouping results in a positive light being shed on all members of the group.

In the present research project, the “model minority” stereotype was an issue addressed directly by school persons, and indirectly by study participants who described behaviors expected by parents that helped perpetuate the “model minority” concept. The present study addressed, through the perceptions of participants, the idea of imposed “panethnicity” for Asians and in particular for Asian subgroups such as the Vietnamese. Indeed, students in the present study did not articulate a direct relationship between the

pervasive “model minority” concept and their school achievement, but the “model minority” concept, as perceived and discussed by school persons does appear to be a factor in establishing positive expectations by school personnel for Vietnamese students’ school achievement.

Immigrants and Refugees

As indicated in earlier chapters, layer upon layer of immigrants came to North America to form the present day United States. What makes the Vietnamese Americans somewhat unique is that they were not only immigrants, but also refugees from a war-ravaged country. For the Vietnamese, there was no time to prepare for the transition to a new country by learning the language (Takaki, 1998; Zhou & Bankston III, 2000b). These immigrants found that the slingshot departures from Vietnam often meant a difficult transition into the new country, including dealing with economic and linguistic barriers. The refugees who settled in the community in which this research was conducted mirrored the refugees described by Takaki, Zhou and Bankston. These refugees arrived in the United States with no ability to speak English. Eighteen of the twenty students in this study commented on linguistic barriers in general, and the difficulty of becoming bilingual in particular. One student’s comments seemed to capture the essence of many other participants’ viewpoints: “When you first come to America, it’s kind of hard because you don’t know what everyone is talking about. So you talk like the Vietnamese language to the people who speak complete English and they might laugh at you” (Thi, Grade 6, Individual Interview).

On the other hand, bilingualism, once attained, was seen by most of the study participants as a positive mechanism that allowed them to move more freely between

their original Vietnamese culture and their domicile, American culture. In fact, bilingualism was identified by half of the study participants as a tool for bridging generational divides between them and older or extended family members. Like many of the other participants in the present study, Trang, a sixth grader, found Vietnamese indispensable in maintaining his relationships with his parents, saying, “I have to talk Vietnamese to my mom and dad because they don’t understand English very well.”

The dogged determination of the older generation to insure the survival of the mother tongue in successive generations through daily oral use of the language and provision for weekly Vietnamese language classes seems to be more than the preservation of cultural artifacts. Rather, it appears to be a critical tool for maintaining communication between generations within a community that is strongly based on kinship. In the present study, students clearly voiced perceptions that their parents vigorously advocated for maintenance of the original language, a factor that potentially contributes to the solidarity of the family and continuity from generation to generation. This family solidarity, in the form of generational continuity and the attendant social capital inherent in intact familial structures, provides a platform from which students can build their academic achievement. This is consistent with findings in a recent study by Zhou & Bankson III (2000a) who determined that Vietnamese language classes and other programs featuring ethnic culture can enhance scholastic performance.

This study found that bilingualism is a keystone in maintaining family ties across generations. These intergenerational family ties are a critical factor in a kinship-based society, as the Vietnamese society has been characterized (Kibria, 1993). Perpetuating the use of the original language was perceived by participants in the present study as an

important factor in maintaining the cohesiveness of the family. The cohesiveness of the family, in turn, provides a platform for the younger generation's school achievement.

Epstein's Parent Involvement

Although multiple typologies for parent involvement were initially considered as frameworks for this study, Epstein's typology appeared to be the most comprehensive and appropriate. Parent involvement, as conceptualized by Epstein (Epstein & Connors, 1992; Epstein, 2001) encompasses six types of parental involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with community.

In Epstein's (Epstein et al., 1997) typology, parenting represents the most fundamental level of support: provision of food, shelter and clothing. As noted earlier, it encompasses the transmission from parent to child of attitudes, beliefs, customs, behaviors, and skills that are unique to the family. Students in the present study who were queried, "What do good Vietnamese parents do?" expressed clear notions. In individual interviews, five participants commented on the role of "good" Vietnamese parents, but Nhat, Grade Six, responded in a way that embodied the sentiments of the other four respondents: "Good Vietnamese parents tell their children to go to school and learn and don't get in trouble. Don't start fight and so the teacher won't call them at their job." One of the study participants, Trang (Grade 6), addressed the issue of material support for learning, saying, "They encourage you and help you do better in school and they buy you books and they help you learn more."

Within the Epstein typology, the research participants and their families evidenced buy-in to four of the six typologies, with "volunteering" and "decision-

making” being the two deficit areas. Additionally, the typology of “learning at home” appeared to be atypical, with siblings frequently supplanting parents in the teaching at home process.

In relation to the central research question of the present study, the collaboration found in this study among school, parents, and community and described by study participants represents an intertwining network of people and activities purposefully designed to under gird academic achievement for Vietnamese American students.

Influences on Parent Involvement

As indicated earlier, there are not only multiple ways in which parental involvement may be manifested, but parental involvement may be influenced by multiple factors. Herman & Yeh (1983) and Lareau (1987) found that these may include family characteristics, community characteristics, parents’ experiences, parents’ socioeconomic status (SES), parents’ educational level, school practices, and students’ grade level.

Family Characteristics

According to Kibria (1993), many of the family traditions that the Vietnamese refugees brought with them from Vietnam were of Chinese origin, including the widely practiced concept of the ancestral cult, wherein the importance of the family eclipses the importance of the individual. Participants in this study affirmed this aspect of family versus individual eminence, noting: “They don’t like you using the rap songs and the curse words. They look at me like, ‘You are a bad child.’ It’s a bad reputation to your family.” The issue of young adolescents, particularly seventh and eighth grade Vietnamese students identifying with and assimilating to other marginalized, minority culture youth was an issue identified by a participant in Zhou & Bankston’s (1998) study

who indicated that “A lot of the American kids they know are kids who skip school, or quit school, and get in trouble a lot. So I think the problem is that they're becoming part of the wrong part of America” (p. 201). Accordingly, in the present study, there was a concerted effort on the part of the leadership of the local Catholic Church to partition the Vietnamese youth from the other, non-Vietnamese youth in such informal social settings as the athletic field that was built and maintained by the Catholic Church. The church had undergone scrutiny about the limited access to the basketball courts and playground and responded that it was a matter of limiting the liability of the church, should an outsider who is not a member of the church be injured on church property. This seems a legitimate concern, but left unanswered questions about what other motivations, if any, may have played into the decision to limit access.

Community Characteristics

The community in which the parents and school are embedded impacts the level of parent involvement. Ten participants in this study who gave their perceptions in individual interviews described their neighborhoods using widely variant adjectives, ranging from “scary” to “quiet.” More detailed descriptions revealed that the neighborhoods were often racially diverse, including both Vietnamese Americans and African Americans. The participant who labeled her neighborhood as “scary” volunteered more information, saying that there are people who go around the neighborhood “like robbing houses and stuff.”

The acknowledgement by study participants of the checkered nature of their communities potentially relates to the first and most fundamental kind of parent involvement described by Epstein’s (1997) parent involvement typology: provision of

food, shelter and clothing. One factor directly impacts the provision of these three items: socioeconomic status. All of the students in this study were identified as low SES, based on their eligibility for free or reduced lunch. Most parents in the present study were economically challenged, lacking sufficient financial capital to have the luxury of choosing other, more upscale neighborhoods. Economics, however, was not the only factor at play in this situation.

Another factor impacted the neighborhoods in which these families lived. According to Zhou & Bankston (1996), "Upon arrival in the United States, the Vietnamese lacked pre-existing ethnic community networks, and their resettlement was largely decided and overseen by government agencies or by voluntary agencies working with the government..." (p. 202). Unlike other earlier waves of immigrants who had autonomy in determining where they would settle, the Vietnamese refugees had locations dictated to them based on a "space available" notion. "From the outset, U.S. refugee resettlement policy had two goals: minimizing the refugees' impact on the communities that would receive them and integrating them into American society as quickly as possible" (Zhou & Bankston, 1998, p. 35). Conversely, little consideration was given to the impact on the Vietnamese immigrants of the communities in which they were placed. Although the Vietnamese had been removed from the influence of an oppressive political situation in their home country, they were often, as is the case with the participants in the present study, placed in a new community that introduced new concerns. These shared concerns of the new immigrants often fostered cohesiveness in the ethnic community which might not have developed under other circumstances, where there was no perceived threat to their well-being.

Parents' Experiences

Parents' pre-immigration experiences varied, depending on which group of immigrants they joined for the transition. The majority of the participants' parents (12 out of 18 responding parents) came in the second wave of Vietnamese immigrants, arriving in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Accordingly, many had experienced a multi-stage relocation from Vietnam and had been part of the "boat people" migration, fraught with danger and privation. The remainder of the parents had arrived in the United States in the mid 1990s to early 2000s, joining families already resettled in the United States, and experiencing a relatively quiet transition from home country to new country.

For some of the parents who immigrated in the 1970s and early 1980s, the flights from their home and their segmented relocation, ultimately to the United States, were defining events in their lives. Specifically, the parent of one of the study participants was in the editing phase of a book that she had written detailing the grueling process of fleeing from Vietnam. Other families who migrated in the same time frame no doubt had similar daunting experiences. Parents who had survived this difficult transition imbued their children with an appreciation of the hard won opportunities in the new country, as evidenced by commentary from Mai, Sixth Grade:

They bring a lot of chance to have a better life cause if you live in Vietnam you never have a better job. The only job is either you are a fisherman, a farmer, or something like that. But when you come over here, people help you to bring up your talents and stuff, so much. It's good to be an American!

This is an example of how a parent's life experience can be translated into messages for their children and impacting the way that they are involved with their children.

Parents' Socioeconomic Status

One of the criteria for participation in the study was eligibility for free or reduced lunch, one index of poverty. Accordingly, all families represented in this study were, by definition, low socioeconomic status, having limited financial capital. As detailed earlier in the discussion of the neighborhoods in which the students lived, SES has the potential to impact students on multiple levels, including provision of basic needs such as food and shelter. However, it also has the potential to provide impetus for using education as a vehicle for upward mobility, as indicated by Nhat, Sixth Grade: "They said that if I go to school, when I grow up I don't need to do a job that have less money and don't have to work like them, hard work and have to work long [hours]."

Parents' Educational Level

Parent responses to a demographic survey conducted in conjunction with the present study revealed that approximately 44% of the parents had completed high school, while 17% had completed university degrees. This data is in contrast to an earlier study conducted by Zhou and Bankston (1996) with high school students in the same community, in which they noted that parents in this community had "exceptionally low levels of education: less than a third had finished high school" (p. 205). Despite the still relatively low high school graduation rate, the parents of participants in this study were perceived by their children to be vigorously advocating for completion of school, and the best possible work while in school. The study participants' responses showed the emphatic nature of their parents' messages regarding school and the long-term consequences of failure to seize the opportunity for an education.

My mama always tells me that if you be a good student then you could succeed in life and you could fulfill the dreams and careers that you want to fulfill and you won't end up on the street like some people, begging for money just to get food and to eat and a shelter to stay in. (Hoa, Grade 8)

When I had spoken with Hoa's mother during the consenting process, she had told me that she had never had the chance to go to school. Using this parent as an example, one might infer that the less formal education the parent had, the more passionate they were in advocating for their child's academic achievement.

School Practices

Although the schools in this research community had measures in place to encourage communication such as newsletters printed in both Vietnamese and English and had established parent rooms and parent liaisons to support school-parent interactions, there was little evidence of direct parent involvement at either of the school sites studied. Observations at the schools indicated that parent liaisons typically assumed a reactive, rather than proactive posture on the campus, only interjecting themselves into the parent-school dialogue when there was a perceived problem. Beyond these described measures, there did not appear to be a positive effort on the part of the schools to engage parents.

Students' Grade Level

Epstein (2001) indicated that there is a notable decline in the level of parent volunteerism at the school building in the middle grades. This finding was borne out at both school sites in the present study, particularly with regard to the Vietnamese parent

body. The most visibility that the parents demonstrated was on the parking lot, dropping off and gathering their children at the beginning and end of the school day.

Summary of Findings

In this study, several broad findings were established. Parents, in their traditional role as parents, as well as members of the ethnic religious and secular communities, provide support for academic achievement among the Vietnamese children. Bilingualism was a bridge across cultures and across generations for participants in this study. Cultural contrasts between the Vietnamese and American communities are manifested in language, celebrations, dress, and food. Ethnic celebrations such as the Tet Holiday promote cohesiveness in the Vietnamese community. Many middle grades Vietnamese students can clearly articulate the expectations that their families have of them in the school setting in general, as well as specific familial expectations for good grades, and good behavior. Furthermore, students articulated their perceptions about their parents' expectation of preserving cultural identity.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was social capital. For the purposes of this study, social capital was defined as a component of family background as viewed in the educational context of examining student achievement, acknowledging that social capital exists in the relationships among people, and that it may be manifested as parent involvement in promoting student achievement (Coleman, 1988). The study was framed against the evolving social capital theory, the early conceptualization of which is most often attributed to Pierre Bourdieu (1986). Both Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988)

exhibited an interest in the sociology of education, which provided a natural conduit for the concept into the broader educational realm.

Discussion of Results and Theoretical Framework

For this study, I have used an ethnographic dataset, comprised of information on 20 students and their families and community, to examine the perception of middle grades students (grades 5-8) regarding what their families and communities do to support their academic efforts. My intent was to describe the factors that these high achieving Vietnamese students perceived had contributed to their academic success. The role of parent involvement was a particular focal point.

This study found that the presence of social capital provides a context in which the financial and human capital provided by the families can be converted into school success by the children. This is consistent with findings from earlier research, including Teachman, et al. (1997) and Coleman (1988), who argued that “financial and human capital of parents are necessary to the development of human capital in their children but by themselves are not sufficient...they must be accompanied by social relationships that allow resources to be transmitted to and used by children” (p. 1357).

Horvat et al. (2003) focused their study on parental networks among middle class families. Parental networks are often considered a central dimension of social capital. Their study considered the impact of parental networks, a frequently cited form of social capital, to discover its impact on children’s schooling. They found that through their networks, middle-class parents affect various aspects of their children’s schooling.

By contrast, parents in this study could generally be characterized as members of the working, rather than middle class based on the educational levels indicated by

responding parents on the parent demographic survey, and the fact that all participants in this study qualified for free or reduced lunch. In this study, I found that parental involvement, as evidenced in parental networks, did affect aspects of children's schooling. However, these parents did not network through associational ties established at typical middle class after school activities, such as sports or dance class. Instead, the primary pivotal point of parent networking was the local Catholic Church, and secondarily, the Vietnamese Educational Association. Neither of these are income- or class-dependent settings. The findings in this study are more in concert with Fisher (Fischer, 1982) who found that blue collar/ working class, or poor families may exhibit parental networks that are often bounded by kinship.

Coleman (1988) provided examples of the importance of social capital in educational settings, including parent networks, and parent-child relations, as they pertain to involvement in children's schooling. Congruent with Coleman, this study found considerable evidence of parent involvement in children's schooling. Parents helped with homework either directly, via delegation to the oldest child, or through the offices of an after-school tutoring program. Parents participated, with varying levels of comfort, in parent-teacher conferences. Parents exerted influence on academic attainment at school, establishing behavioral norms regarding school that were highly recognizable to their children. Parents provided material support in the form of school supplies.

Earlier, researchers (Zhou & Bankston, 1996) studied this same community using social capital as a conceptual framework. Using empirical data, they found that the children of this community were unlikely to advance in society on the basis of their families' limited human or financial capital, an important exception "being the social

capital provided by their intact families" (p. 206). The present study, conducted nearly a decade later, found that the majority of the participants in the study came from intact, traditional two-parent families that actively supported them toward the goal of academic attainment. The intact, two-parent families continue to provide a source of social capital for the student participants.

Delimitations and Limitations of Study

Delimitations

In general, delimitations narrow the scope of a study (Creswell, 1998). Accordingly, students in high school or lower elementary were not included, neither were students who were not of Vietnamese origin. There was no consideration given to low performing students who were members of either the majority or a non-majority culture. Students who had middle or high socioeconomic status were not considered in this study. Therefore, this study is delimited by the fact that it was confined to interviewing high academic achievement, low socioeconomic status Vietnamese students currently enrolled in grades five through eight.

Limitations

One of the limitations of the present study, however, which needs to be acknowledged, is that there are numerous Vietnamese children living in foster care whose parents did not consent to their participation. These children are, according to the English as a Second Language Teacher, placed in homes with American foster parents because the biological parents did not accompany their children to the United States, but presumably remained in Vietnam. These children are nominally part of the school and ethnic community, but are not represented in this study. Unfortunately, without the

granting of proper informed consent by the guardians of these children, participation in the study is prohibited.

Furthermore, this study may be limited by the fact that the findings of the study are subject to interpretations other than those included in the study. This limitation is further impacted by the fact that qualitative data, collected in the form of words, is inherently more ambiguous than numerically based empirical data.

Implications for Practice

Implications for Parents

Parents need to be more assertive in assuming a variety of roles in their children's schools, including assumption of decision making roles as well as volunteering their time, whenever possible, to support the educational mission of the schools. Regardless of their own level of education, they must actively seek opportunities to forge connections between home and school.

It is important to access all available social resources within the ethnic community. In an ethnic community embedded in a larger disadvantaged community, the social resources, or social capital, may constitute the best asset in seeking a better future for the children.

Implications for Schools

Both individual schools and school districts need to establish clear strategies for promoting and facilitating parent involvement for all parents, including non-majority parents. Schools need to be more proactive in developing innovative programs that will engage parents in the educational partnership between school and family. School districts need to be cognizant of parent involvement models that are working to support students'

academic success, whether they are traditional models for parent involvement, or idiosyncratic models unique to a particular culture or ethnicity.

Implications for Teachers

Teachers and other school personnel need to be exposed to information pertaining to non-majority students and their families. New teachers who are entering the profession need to have pre-service training in applied multiculturalism that addresses unique concerns and needs of a wide spectrum of learners. Pre-service and in-service teachers need to have ongoing training in the aspects of cultural diversity that may impact their instructional style, curriculum, and the manner in which they interact with parents and students.

Teachers need to be aware that working effectively with non-majority children in general, and Vietnamese children in particular, necessarily involves looking at them within the context of both extended and nuclear families. Not only must teachers consider these children within their familial context, but they must also consider them within the context of the ethnic community.

Implications for Colleges and Universities

Teacher preparation curricula in colleges and universities should include a component on cultural diversity which will enable teachers to more competently instruct learners from non majority cultures, and to communicate with non majority children and their parents. Multiculturalism and cultural sensitivity should be the focal points of these courses. In the same way that many universities require general education teachers to complete coursework to enable them to interact effectively with exceptional learners who are academically gifted or learning disabled, universities should require a parallel

instructional component to address effective interaction with children from immigrant families.

Implications for Future Research

While there has been a recent proliferation of studies examining social capital in educational contexts (Dika & Singh, 2002), the studies were largely empirical in nature, and used fairly consistent indicators of social capital, including family structure, parents' aspirations and expectations of student, and parent education, and parent networks, generally referred to as intergenerational closure. Educational achievement outcome measures used in these studies were also increasingly familiar across the span of recent research on social capital, and included GPA (Israel, Beaulieu, & Hartless, 2001; Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999) math gain scores (Morgan & Sorenson, 1999) standardized test scores for science (McNeal, 1999) and math and reading combined (Israel et al., 2001; Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999).

Although this study examined some familiar indicators of social capital and used now familiar outcome measures of student achievement, it did so in the theoretical research paradigm, utilizing qualitative methodology in the form of focus group discussions and individual interviews. Further studies are indicated to dispel the chronic "conceptual murkiness" (Horvat et al., 2003) which has plagued most research about social capital. While Zhou & Bankston (2000a, 2000b) explored issues surrounding social capital with Vietnamese American high school students, this study explored the perceptions of middle grades students about factors that contributed to their school achievement against the conceptual framework of social capital. Further studies need to

be conducted with younger populations of Vietnamese and other non-majority students to broaden the knowledge base.

Additionally, more qualitative studies need to be conducted with immigrant populations to explore how social capital can be parlayed into human and financial capital. Manifestations of sociological and educational phenomena that are fairly recognizable with established, “native” populations may appear quite different in immigrant populations. This country has historically, and is likely to continue, to embrace individuals fleeing from oppression in their countries of origin. So long as that is true, the gathering of more information on how these groups become productive actors in the larger society will be relevant.

Summary

This qualitative study explored the research question, “What are the perceptions of low socioeconomic status, high academic achievement Vietnamese American middle grades students of the factors within their communities and families that have contributed to their school achievement?”

Using the conceptual framework of social capital, this study explored the relationship between socioeconomic status and student achievement. Participants in the present study did not evidence a positive relationship between SES and student achievement. Based on the perceptions of the participants, this study found that minority parent involvement is constituted in part by the clear articulation of educational attainment expectations from parent to child. While none of the study participants articulated concerns pertaining to the “model minority” stereotype, this study found, through anecdotal data, that the “model minority” stereotype was a factor in the

educational experience of these students. This study found that refugee status of the parents of participants affected the adaptation of the parents and potential assimilation of the family to American culture. This study found that participants' parents tended to engage in parental involvement in some traditional ways, as indicated by their investment in four of the six typologies of Epstein's parent involvement model. Finally, the study found that there were myriad influences, including family characteristics, community characteristics, parents' experiences, parents' socioeconomic status (SES), parents' educational level, school practices, and students' grade level, which impacted the parental involvement of these Vietnamese American parents of high academic achievement middle grades students.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Consent Form

(English Version)

1. **Information about this research.** I am studying students' attitudes about education and what their parents do to help them with school. I will use the results of this study to help improve learning opportunities for students.
2. **My name is Judith Scott.** I am a doctoral student, as well as the Coordinator for Gifted Programs for Orleans Parish Schools. You can contact me at University of New Orleans, Department of Special Education and Habilitative Services, 246 Education Building, New Orleans, LA 70148 Telephone: (504) 280-6609.
3. **Purpose.** I want to learn more about what Vietnamese American students in the middle grades (5-8) think about the things that their parents and members of the community do to support their school effort and learning.
4. **Methods.** (1) I will review your child's records at the school. (2) I will talk to your child in a group about doing homework outside of school. These group meetings will be about 45 minutes long. (3) I will talk to your child individually. This individual meeting will be 20-30 minutes long. All meetings will be scheduled outside of class time.
5. **Participation.** Participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw consent and stop participating at any time without consequence.
6. **Confidentiality.** The names of all students and their schools will be kept confidential at all times.
7. **Signatures and Consent to Participate.** I understand that my child's school records are protected under the Rights of Privacy Act, and I have given permission for those records to be reviewed by the researcher, for this study.

I have been given information about this study, and the fact that my child's identity will be protected. I also understand that my child's participation in this study is completely voluntary. I have given my permission for my child to participate in this study.

_____ Signature of Parent	_____ Name of Parent	_____ Date
	_____ Name of Student	
_____ Signature of Researcher	Judith Scott _____ Researcher	_____ Date

Appendix A
Nhờ Xin Phê duyệt
 (Bản tiếng Việt)

1. **Lời mở đầu của cuộc nghiên cứu.** Tôi đang tìm hiểu về những thái độ của học sinh về vấn đề giáo dục, và phụ huynh nào làm gì để giúp con em họ trở nên. Tôi sẽ dùng kết quả của tôi tham khảo để giúp nâng cao việc học hạnh cho các em học sinh.
2. **Tôi tên là Judith Scott.** Tôi đang dạy học và là giảng viên số của trường Phái Trí viên cho những chương trình Thiệp Trẻ của các trường thuộc quận Orleans. Quý vị có thể liên lạc với tôi tại trường này hoặc New Orleans, phần khoa của các chương trình Special Education and Habilitative Services, 246 Education Building, New Orleans La 70128 . số phone (504) 280-6609.
3. **Mức độ:** Tôi muốn hiểu biết thêm về các học sinh Việt Nam cấp trung (5-8) nghĩ gì về cha mẹ và công việc trong việc giúp đỡ con cái học hạnh.
4. **Phỏng vấn:**(1) Tôi sẽ coi lại hồ sơ của con quý vị. (2) Tôi sẽ nói chuyện với con quý vị trong một nhóm về bài học về nhà ngoại ngữ hoặc. Những nhóm này sẽ họp khoảng 45 phút hoặc hơn. (3) Tôi sẽ nói chuyện riêng từng em. Và cuộc họp riêng này sẽ mất khoảng 15 tới 20 phút. Tất cả cuộc họp sẽ được xếp ngoại ngữ hoặc.
5. **Sở hữu gia.** Việc tham gia này hoàn toàn miễn phí. Quý vị có thể từ chối hoặc làm bất cứ điều gì cần thiết.
6. **Cẩn thận.** Tên của em và tên trường sẽ luôn được giữ kín.
7. **Chỗ ký cho phê duyệt đồng ý tham gia.** Tôi hiểu là hồ sơ của học sinh được báo về qua Quyền Toàn Trưởng Nhà Trẻ, và tôi đồng ý phê duyệt nhà trường cho coi các hồ sơ cho việc nghiên cứu này.

Tôi nhận được đồng ý của quý vị cho việc tham khảo và tin rằng danh tiếng của con tôi được giữ kín. Tôi cũng hiểu rằng sở hữu gia của con tôi trong việc tham khảo này là hoàn toàn miễn phí. Tôi cho phê duyệt con tôi đồng ý tham gia vào việc học hoặc đời này.

Chỗ ký của phụ huynh thông	Tên phụ huynh	Ngày/
Tên của học sinh		
Judith Scott		
Chỗ ký của tham khảo viên hàng	Tham khảo viên	Ngày/

Appendix A

January 2004

Dear Parent,

Please take a few minutes to complete the following information:

Your Child's Name _____ Grade _____ Child's Country of Birth _____

Your Name _____ Your Country of Birth _____

How long have you lived in the United States? _____

What is the highest level of education you have completed? (Circle one)

Grade school (K-8) High School (9-12) College (Bachelors) College (Graduate Degree)

Language most frequently spoken at home _____

Telephone number(s) where you can be reached _____

Thank you for taking time to answer these questions. This information is very important to the process of discovering why your sons and daughters are such excellent students. I appreciate your help very much.

Sincerely,

Judith Scott

Appendix B

TO: Dr. James Lloyd
FROM: Judith Scott, Gifted/Talented Coordinator
DATE: September 15, 2003
SUBJECT: Application to Conduct Research in Orleans Parish Schools

Please review the enclosed application. My proposed study, as you will see, focuses on perceptions of middle school students about the factors that affect their school achievement. The design is qualitative, and is proposed to include surveys, focus groups, and interviews with the subject population.

If you have any questions, or would like clarification on any of the items addressed in the Application, do not hesitate to call me either at my office, 365-5574, or on my mobile phone, 957-9492. My current office address is Room 396, 3500 Building.

Thank you for taking time to review these materials. I look forward to hearing from you.

Enclosure: Original + 1 copy of Application to
Conduct Research

Approved
James Lloyd 10/16/03

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*Note:
Student interviews
should NOT be
held during academic
time*



New Orleans Public Schools
Bilingual/ESL Program
3510 General DeGaulle Drive
New Orleans, LA 70114



(504) 365-5617

Fax (504) 365-8697

Charlotte M. Steber, M.Ed.
Program Specialist

To: Dr. James Lloyd
Executive Assistant for Quality Control and Compliance

From: *Charlotte Steber*
Charlotte Steber
Program Specialist

Subject: Dissertation Research Proposal for Judith Scott

Date: September 30, 2003

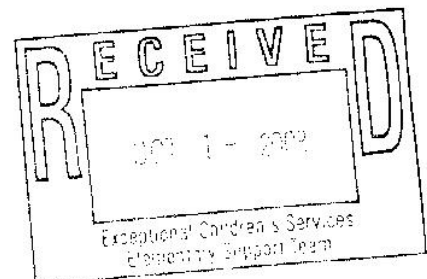
As per your request, I have reviewed the dissertation research proposal submitted by Mrs. Judith Scott, for the purpose of collecting data from an elementary and a middle school in the district.

Her procedural plan will include surveys, interviews and focus groups. I have examined the instruments submitted and find them to be culturally sensitive, non-discriminatory and acceptable for use as part of her research proposal.

Should you need additional information, please contact me at 365-5617.

c. Judith Scott

CS/md



Appendix C

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ORLEANS
COMMITTEE ON THE USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS

Form Number: 8DEC03 (please refer to this number in all future correspondence concerning this protocol)

Principal Investigator: Judith Scott Title: Graduate Student

Department: Special Ed. & Habilitative Services College: Education & Human Development

Name of Faculty Supervisor: C.E. Wellington (if PI is a student)

Project Title: Perceptions of low SES, high academic achievement Vietnamese middle school students of factors that have contributed to their student achievement

Date Reviewed: December 8, 2003

Dates of Proposed Project Period: From 12/03 to 12/04

*approval is for one year from approval date only and may be renewed yearly.

Note: Consent forms and related materials are to be kept by the PI for a period of three years following the completion of the study.

Full Committee Approval

Expedited Approval

Continuation

Rejected

The protocol will be approved following receipt of satisfactory response(s) to the following question(s) within 15 days:

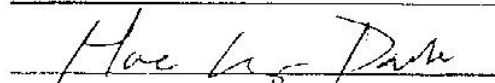
LIST Both Student + faculty supervisor name + contact # on
consent form.

Committee Signatures:

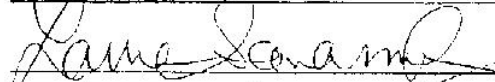
 Scott C. Bauer, Ph.D. (Chair)

_____ Gary Granata, Ph.D.

_____ Betty Lo, M.D.

 Hae-Seong Park, Ph.D.

_____ Jayaraman Rao, M.D. (NBDL protocols only)

 Laura Scaramella, Ph.D.

 Richard B. Speaker, Ph.D.

_____ Gary Talarchek, Ph.D.



UNIVERSITY OF NEW ORLEANS

DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND HABILITATIVE SERVICES

Consent Form

- 1. Information about this research.** I am studying students' attitudes about education and what their parents do to help them with school. I will use the results of this study to help improve learning opportunities for students.
- 2. My name is Judith Scott.** I am a doctoral student, as well as the Coordinator for Gifted Programs for Orleans Parish Schools. You can contact me at University of New Orleans, Department of Special Education and Habilitative Services, 246 Education Building, New Orleans, LA 70148 Telephone: (504) 280-6609. The university faculty supervisor for this project is Dr. Bud Wellington. You can reach him at (504) 280-6535 should you have questions about the research project.
- 3. Purpose.** I want to learn more about what Vietnamese American students in the middle grades (5-8) think about the things that their parents and members of the community do to support their school effort and learning.
- 4. Methods.** (1) I will review your child's records at the school. (2) I will talk to your child in a group about doing homework outside of school. These group meetings will be about 45 minutes long. (3) I will talk to your child individually. This individual meeting will be 20-30 minutes long. All meetings will be scheduled outside of class time.
- 5. Participation.** Participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw consent and stop participating at any time without consequence.
- 6. Confidentiality.** The names of all students and their schools will be kept confidential at all times.

Parent Signatures and Consent to Participate. I understand that my child's school records are protected under the Rights of Privacy Act, and I have given permission for those records to be reviewed by the researcher, for this study.

I have been given information about this study, and the fact that my child's identity will be protected. I also understand that my child's participation in this study is completely voluntary. I have given my permission for my child to participate in this study.

_____	_____	_____
Signature of Parent	Name of Parent	Date

	Name of Student	
_____	Judith Scott	_____
Signature of Researcher	Researcher	Date

"UNO offers the best value for your tuition dollar."

Kaplan/Newsweek College Catalog 2002

"UNO is rated as one of the top schools supporting diversity."

- Kaplan/Newsweek College Catalog 2002

Appendix D



UNIVERSITY OF NEW ORLEANS

DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND
HABILITATIVE SERVICES

February 13, 2004

Dear Parent:

On behalf of the University of New Orleans and Orleans Parish Public Schools, I am writing to invite your child to take part in a research project. As part of my doctoral program, I am conducting research to find out what successful Vietnamese students in the middle grades (5-8) think about the things that their families and their community do to support their academic achievement in school. I hope you will allow your child to participate, because the information about your child's views will be very useful to teachers and other families.

If you would like your child to be part of this effort, please fill out the enclosed permission slip for your child, seal it in the attached envelope, and give it to the person who delivered it to you. Every child who returns the permission slip and participates in the study will get a small gift from me through the talented art teacher.

Students selected for the study will be asked to participate in a student discussion group and an individual interview. These activities will take place outside of school time so that schoolwork will not be disrupted. Each of these activities will last approximately 30 minutes.

Please be assured that any information your child gives me will be kept confidential. Any information collected from the student discussion groups and interviews will not be read by your child's teacher or other school personnel. After I have analyzed the information, I will give a summary of the findings to Ms. Oliver-Williams, the Principal. You are welcome to read that summary, which will be ready in April 2004.

If you have any questions about this research project please feel free to call me at the University of New Orleans, 280-6609, or at home, 286-9507. Thank you for your help with this important study.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Judith Scott".

Judith Scott, M.Ed.
Doctoral Candidate
University of New Orleans

Appendix E

Focus Group Question Guide 9-14-03

Parents at School

1. Have your parents ever come to school?
2. When did they come?
3. Why did they come?
4. What did they say to you about their trip to the school?
5. Do your parents like to come to school?

Culture

1. What does it mean to be American?
 - a. What are the good things about being American?
 - b. What are the bad things about being American?
2. What does it mean to be Vietnamese?
 - a. What are the good things about being Vietnamese?
 - b. What are the bad things about being Vietnamese?
3. With regard to the Vietnamese culture, do you think all Vietnamese parents think the same way?
 - a. Why?
 - b. Why not?

Values

1. Why must you obey your mother and father?
2. What happens if you don't?
3. Why is that important?
4. How do you know that's what you should do?
5. Explain the reasons for this.

After School

1. What did your parents say about tutoring?
 - a. Why do you think they say this?
 - b. Do they ever come to tutoring classes?
2. What do your parents say about attending Vietnamese language classes?
 - a. Why do they say this?
3. What do your parents say about attending church?
 - a. Why do you think they say this?

School Performance

1. What do your parents say to you about your grades?
2. Why do you think they say this to you?
3. What do your parents do to let you know what they think about your performance in school?

Appendix E

Focus Group Discussion Guide 10-7-03

Welcome

1. Welcome! I am glad to see you today.
2. How are your classes going this year?
3. I know, from having spoken with your teachers and school counselors, that you are all excellent students, etc.
4. All of your parents have agreed to your participation in this research project, after I spoke with them about the project and have signed a permission slip so that you could participate.
5. Icebreaker activity: “Find someone who...”
6. Since we completed our activity, we all know more about each other. This could make our discussion today even better!

Orienting the group

1. The study I am conducting with you looks at your ideas about what your parents do to support you in your school activities. You are members of this special group because you have scored well on your yearly tests, have good grades, and are Vietnamese American students in the middle grades of school.
2. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you can choose to stop participating at any time. You can also refuse to answer any question.
3. What we discuss here is confidential. Although I am recording our discussion, when the tapes are transcribed, your identity will be protected. In addition, it is important that you not discuss today’s meeting once we leave here. Are there any questions?
4. I will serve as the group moderator, and will be asking questions that may require some “think” time.
5. Everyone’s opinions are important. Please allow the other members of the group to complete their comment before you speak.

School Performance

1. What do you perceive (think) makes you a successful student?
2. What do your parents say to you about your grades?
3. What do your parents do to let you know what they think about your performance in school?

Appendix E

Parents at School

1. Have your parents ever come to school?
2. When did they come?
3. Why did they come?
4. What did they say to you about their trip to the school?
5. Do your parents like to come to school?

After School

1. What did your parents say about tutoring?
 - a. Possible probe: Why do you think they say this?
 - b. Possible probe: Do they ever come to tutoring classes?
2. What do your parents say about attending Vietnamese language classes?
 - a. Probe: What do they say this?
3. What do your parents say about attending church?
 - a. Probe: Why do they say this?

Culture

1. What does it mean to be American?
 - a. What are the good things about being American?
 - b. What are the bad things about being American?
2. What does it mean to be Vietnamese?
 - a. What are the good things about being Vietnamese?
 - b. What are the bad things about being Vietnamese?
3. With regard to Vietnamese culture, do you think all Vietnamese parents think the same way?
 - a. Why?
 - b. Why not?

Values

1. Why must you obey your mother and father?
2. What happens if you don't?
3. Why is that important?
4. How do you know that's what you should do?
5. Explain your reasons for this.

Appendix E

Focus Group Discussion Guide (12-6-03)

Welcome

1. Welcome! I am glad to see you today.
2. How are your classes going this year?
3. I know, from having spoken with your teachers and school counselors, that you are all excellent students. What do you think makes you such good students?
4. All of your parents have agreed to your participation in this research project, after I spoke with them about the project. They have signed a permission slip so that you could participate.
5. Icebreaker activity: Draw a picture of yourself doing homework.

Orienting the Group and Confidentiality

1. We are here today to talk about what your parents do to support you in your school activities. You are members of this special group because you have scored well on your yearly tests, have good grades, and are Vietnamese American students in the middle grades of school.
2. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you can choose to stop participating at any time. You can also refuse to answer any question.
3. I will serve as the group moderator, and will be asking questions that may require some “think” time.
4. Everyone’s opinions are important. Please allow the other members of the group to complete their comment before you speak.
5. What we discuss here is confidential. It is important that you do not discuss today’s meeting with other students once we leave here. Although I am recording our discussion, when the tapes are transcribed, your identity will be protected. Are there any questions?

School Performance

Tell me a story about what happened when you brought your report card home.

Parents at School

Tell me a story about when your parents came to school.

After School

1. Can you tell me about the after-school tutoring program?
2. What happens when you go there?

Appendix E

3. What would happen if you didn't go?
4. What new things does it teach you?

Culture

All of you are Vietnamese Americans.

1. Tell me about the two parts – Vietnamese and American.
2. What's the same about being Vietnamese and being American?
3. What is different about being Vietnamese and being American?
4. Sometimes I hear that Vietnamese parents don't want their children to be "too American." What does that mean?

Values

Tell me a story about a time when you had trouble deciding whether or not to obey your parents.

Appendix E

Focus Group Discussion Guide (Revised 2-5-04)

Welcome

1. I am here today to be a student. Today you are going to teach me about being a successful student.
2. How are your classes going this year?
3. All of your parents have agreed to let you be part of this research project by signing a permission slip.
4. Icebreaker activity: Moderator and students share pizza and soft drinks.

Orienting the Group and Confidentiality

1. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose to stop participating at any time, and you may choose not to answer any question.
2. Everyone's ideas are important. Please be sure that other students have a chance to finish sharing their idea before you begin speaking.
3. What we talk about here today is confidential. It is important that you not discuss today's meeting with other students once you leave here. Although I have a tape recorder to record your ideas, your identity will be protected. Are there any questions?

School Performance

1. How do you do your homework?
Possible probe: What's the easiest? What is the hardest?
2. When you are doing your homework and you get stuck, what do you do?
If the response is "ask for help," then a possible probe might be "Who do you ask for help?"
3. Tell me a story about when you got stuck on homework.
4. Tell me a specific thing that was causing a problem?
 - a. How did you solve it?

Family

1. Who are the members of your immediate family?
2. Who lives in your house?
3. What do your parents tell you about school?
4. What do your parents tell you about taking tests?

Appendix E

After School

1. Can you tell me about the after school tutoring programs?
 - c. What new things does it teach you?
2. What do you do at Vietnamese School?
 - a. Possible probe to elicit more fluency: Tell me a story about being Vietnamese.
 - b. What is unique about being Vietnamese?

Culture

1. Sometimes I hear that Vietnamese parents don't want their children to be too American. What does that mean?
2. Response: from first Focus Group member: Forgetting your Vietnamese language.
 - a. Probe: So being too American means forgetting your language. What else does it mean?

<p>What I want to know/Attributes I am aware of through literature review, observation, and focus group discussions</p>	<p>Individual Interview Questions (Revised 3-4-04)</p>
<p>Family</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *typically intact *extended vs. nuclear *SES is low *family/parents exert strong authority *parents often minimally educated *dominant language spoken at home is Vietnamese; adult English fluency is low *many families live in “ethnic” communities, comprised exclusively of Vietnamese and African Americans 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What do your parents tell you about school? 2. What do your parents tell you about being a good student? 3. What do your parents tell you about doing tests? 4. What do your parents tell you about making good grades? 5. What do “good” Vietnamese parents do? 6. Why must you obey your parents? -What would happen if you didn’t? 7. Who are the members of your immediate family?
<p>School</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *relationships between family and school *relationships between peers *relationships with teachers 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you tell me about the most recent time your parents talked to your teachers? 2. What did your parents tell you about this “teacher talk”? 3. When you have a choice, who do you “hang out” with at school? After school? 4. What do your friends say about school? About homework? 5. What do other gifted students say about school? 6. Have you ever gotten in trouble at school? Tell me a story about what happened. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - what did the teacher say? - what did your parents say? - what did your friends say?

VITA

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She has worked with learners of all ages, and has used her experiences as a lifelong learner to support her in the various roles of mother, wife, teacher, curriculum developer, principal, and administrator. She is currently working as a curriculum developer and teacher of the gifted in a rural school district in the Missouri Ozark foothills.