

PERCEPTIONS AND KNOWLEDGE THAT 7TH AND 8TH GRADE HMONG STUDENTS
HAVE OF SCHOOL GUIDANCE DEPARTMENTS

by

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ABSTRACT

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(Title)	The Knowledge and Perceptions that Hmong Students Have of a Guidance Program		
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The purpose of this study was to see how 7th and 8th grade Hmong students perceive their school's guidance department. Data was collected through the use of a survey that was administered to 35 stratified randomly selected 7th and 8th grade Hmong middle school students during the 2003-2004 school year in the Eau Claire Area School District.

Everyday Hmong students are faced with having to live in two separate types of environments at school and in the Hmong culture. The expectations for both are different and these students have to be able to function and be successful in both environments. The major differences between the cultures are language, social expectations, and family heritage. Many Hmong students are confused and need guidance to make it through these difficult years of growth. The school's guidance department is one area in the school that should be prepared to help with these issues.

This study looked at the differences in culture and expectations for Hmong students at school and home and looked at how the students used the guidance department's services to help

them deal with their issues. The findings from this study revealed the needs of Hmong students, how they use the guidance department in their schools, and how teachers, administrators, and the community can more effectively meet their needs as they grow into adulthood. Results of the study will be used to help others understand what kind of struggles these students encounter and what can be done to help them.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

When the military troops of the United States pulled out of Vietnam in 1975, the world drastically changed for the Hmong people. During the Vietnam War, the Hmong people were recruited by the CIA to help with operations against the communist forces in Laos and Vietnam. The Royal Laos government was overthrown by the Pathet Lao forces when the American forces pulled out. With the new communist government in control, the Hmong people were considered to be traitors for helping the United States forces and were punished for their actions. Chi and Park (1999) stated in their book *Asian-American education: Prospects and challenges* that “many of them were killed by the Lao communist soldiers, died of starvation or illness, or drowned in the Mekong River” (p. 220). The United States tried to help by creating refugee camps in Thailand and then provided them the opportunity to resettle in the United States. Many Hmong who were able to reach the refugee camps took advantage of this opportunity, but many of the Hmong could not avoid the mistreatment and punishment of the Pathet Lao government and did not survive. Those who resettled in the United States found freedom and an escape from the Pathet Lao government. The Wisconsin Policy Research Institute Report (1997) reported that in 1975, 9,000 Hmong were relocated in the United States. By 1981, 52,000 had arrived in the United States. The main concentrations were in California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. According to Chi and Park (1999), the United States has the largest number of Hmong immigrants in the western countries at an estimated 165,000.

The Hmong found freedom and safety in the United States, but this was not the end of their struggles. They were thrown into a world that was different than their country and customs. Their culture, family structure, education, religion, language, and job skills were completely

different than those found in the United States. They were not provided with the assistance they needed to understand their new world. The United States government tried to assimilate them into our society as quickly as possible. However, they did not attempt to understand the Hmong culture and ways of life. For example, when they placed Hmong families in the United States, they dispersed them throughout the country so one area of the country did not have all of the Hmong people together. The government felt that separating them would help them to assimilate faster into the American society. What the United States government didn't take into consideration was that the Hmong people live in distinct clans and that some clans do not get along with others. By being dispersed, the Hmong people were taken away from their strong clan system. The Hmong people not only had to learn how to live in a new world, but they also had to do it without the support of their clan. This type of situation and others like it led to many problems and struggles for the Hmong as they tried to live in a new world.

There are many examples of cultural differences that contributed to their struggles. One example was family structure. Barbara Shade (1997) stated in her book *Culture, style, and the educative process*, "that the primary conflict between Hmong culture and American culture is a focus on the family as compared with and emphasis upon individual freedom" (p. 110). In the Hmong culture, the family belongs to a clan and the family comes before the individual. A traditional Hmong household consists of grandparents, parents, children, unmarried brothers and sisters, and grandchildren (Chi & Park, 1999). In the typical American culture, the individual is encouraged to be different or do things which are best for him/herself and the family. The typical household has one or two parents and maybe some siblings, but rarely extended family members. Another cultural difference is in how each culture recognizes holidays. The Hmong culture has one holiday the entire year and it focuses on the New Year. In the United States, we have one or

more holidays almost every month. Some of these holidays are religious and some are not. Finally, things as basic as communication are different between the two cultures. In the Hmong culture, it is a sign of disrespect to look at someone in the eyes when you are talking to them. In the Untied States, not looking at someone in the eyes when they are talking to you is a sign of disrespect and weakness. These and many other cultural differences have made the adjustment for the Hmong into the American society difficult and challenging.

Though the Hmong people have started to overcome these cultural differences and succeed in America, there are still those who struggle. Children of the adults who first moved to the United States have been more successful at assimilating into American culture. In the public education system, Hmong students have had a better opportunity to learn English, experience the American culture, and understand what is expected of them in school and the community. Though having a better understanding of the American culture has helped Hmong students to succeed, it has also put them in a very difficult place with their families. Today's Hmong students are faced with having to make decisions that conflict with either their Hmong culture or the American culture. Hmong students might want to celebrate holidays that their friends at school celebrate, but their families might not approve because it is against their cultural beliefs. Hmong students might want to go to college and get an education and their parents expect them to help support the family by getting a job. Hmong students are being pulled in two very different directions and many times they are faced with the difficult decision of picking one over the other. Chi and Park (1999) stated that "the rapid acculturation of the Hmong children increases the generation gap and socio-cultural distance between family members" (p. 225). It is a difficult decision to make for anyone, let alone a young teenager. When dealing with these types of situations, who do they turn to for help and advice? They can turn to their parents,

friends, teachers, or community members, but most of those people probably do not have a full understanding of the difference between the two cultures.

The purpose of this study is to determine who Hmong students go to for help and how school guidance counselors can make themselves more available and useful to these students. How do Hmong students perceive the counseling programs in schools and what do they know about the program and the services it can provide? By answering this question, counselors will have a better understanding of how to more effectively help Hmong students and know how to educate them about the counseling services provided in the school. If the students know that help is available and understand how to utilize the counseling services, they will improve their chances of success at school and in the community.

Statement of the Problem

Hmong students face many challenges in their lives. They need people they can turn to for help and understanding when they are trying to live lives that can include both their Hmong culture and the American culture. Schools need to help these students through these difficult times and school guidance counselors need to have a better understanding of how they can help and make themselves more available to the Hmong student population and their families.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions and knowledge that 7th and 8th grade Hmong students have of the guidance program in their school. Hmong students from 1 middle school in the Chippewa Valley will be selected to participate in a written survey conducted during the Spring semester of 2004.

Research Questions

There were 5 main research questions this study wishes to address. They are:

1. Do Hmong students believe that school counselors can be helpful with their acculturation problems?
2. What are Hmong students' perceptions of how acculturation has affected their lives at home and school?
3. What social problems do Hmong students report facing in schools?
4. How do Hmong students use counseling services that are provided in schools?
5. Are schools and their guidance departments meeting the needs of Hmong students?

Definition of Terms

The following key words were defined to further clarify the content of this research paper.

Acculturation - Cultural modification of an individual, group, or people adapting to or borrowing traits from another culture.

Refugee - An individual or group of people who flees to a foreign country or power to escape danger or persecution.

Assumptions and Limitations

It is assumed that the students involved took their time in filling out the survey and answered the questions honestly. A limitation to this study would be that not all Hmong students would be able to fully understand the questions based on possible language barriers and cultural differences.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

This chapter will include a discussion of the historical background of the Hmong people, followed by a discussion of the Hmong family and cultural system. In addition, this chapter will then look specifically at issues faced by Hmong students and their family. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of what research has discovered about Hmong students and what types of education can effectively help them to overcome the struggles they face.

Historical Background

Four thousand years ago the Hmong people lived in central Asia where they eventually migrated to south central China (Shade, 1997). By the nineteenth century, they started to settle in areas now known as Thailand, Vietnam, and Laos. The highest concentration of Hmong people was in Laos, where they lived in small villages throughout the countryside. Most of the Hmong families lived in agricultural farming communities where they practiced “slash-and-burn” farming techniques (Shade, 1997). Vang Pobzeb (2001, n.p.), an expert on the Hmong culture, stated that “the Hmong people are known as ‘Miao’ or ‘Meo’ which is considered a derogatory name by the Hmongs. Hmong means ‘free people or human being’.” The Hmong people had a reputation for having a good work ethic and strong family ties. They took great pride in their freedom and independence.

With a history that dates 4,000 years ago, the Hmong people lived relatively peaceful lives until the 1900’s and more specifically the Vietnam War. During and after the Vietnam War, the Hmong people’s lives drastically changed. John Neira (1995) stated in his research that there were six stages that led up to the Hmong resettling in the United States. These six stages were: the Laos penetration stage, Laos traditional stage, Laos adaptive stage, Laos resettlement

stage, Thailand camp stage, and United States resettlement stage. Here is how Neira described each stage and what he found to be the most important events of these 6 stages.

The Laos penetration stage was the first stage when the Hmong first settled in the Laos and Thailand areas of Southeast Asia from central Asia. After establishing communities and villages in this area the second stage occurred.

In the Laos traditional stage, the Hmong traded goods and services with the Laotian and Chinese traders. They stayed close to their homes and rarely left home to trade. They lived a simple life and were satisfied with where they lived and who they came into contact with in their community. Education did not have much importance.

The third stage was the Laos adaptive stage. During this stage the Hmong started to get more involved with trading with people other than the Laotian and Chinese and with the local markets. It was at this point in the Hmong history that they first started to have formal education. The Laos government organized schools in Hmong villages. Some Hmong students had the opportunity to travel abroad to parts of Europe to receive a higher education. It was also at this time that Christianity was being introduced to the Hmong people.

The fourth stage, Laos resettlement stage, was when the Vietnam War started to take place. During this stage, many of the Hmong had to resettle in refugee camps near military bases because of all the fighting that occurred near their villages. At this time they were introduced to modern technology and some began to speak English as a second or even third language. Education during this stage was beginning to become more structured, but as the war progressed, education became less of a priority.

The fifth stage was the Thailand camp stage. During this time the Hmong people's traditional way of life changed and they were forced to leave their homelands. The Hmong had a

new government to follow when they arrived in the Thailand refugee camps. Many families were torn apart and many family members died on the journey to Thailand. During this time some Hmong children went to Thai schools. It was in these schools that Hmong students started to learn formal English. This would prove to be extremely helpful when they started to live in the United States (Neira, 1995).

The final stage is the United States resettlement stage. During this time some of the Hmong people came to the United States. Because the Hmong helped the United States military during the Vietnam War, the United States government said that they would protect the Hmong if they ever left the Southeast Asian area. This is the reason why the Hmong came to America. It was during this stage that many Hmong discovered that their traditional way of life would never be the same.

By 1981 it was reported that about 51,000 Hmong lived in the United States. During the late 70's and early 80's, a secondary migration in the United States occurred. When the Hmong came to America, they were relocated throughout the country. This relocation was not healthy for the Hmong clan system, so many Hmong moved to be closer to family and clan members. Paoze Thao (1999), a historian of the Hmong culture, stated that there were two types of migration within the United States. The first was reunification migration. This type of migration was based on reuniting with family members. During this type of migration, a clan or family group who is following other Hmongs, is first resettled in a place far from the Hmongs they intend to rejoin. In these cases, plans to move are made as soon as contact is made with the original group (Thao, 1999). The second migration category is betterment migration. During this type of migration, the Hmong discovered that the United States was divided up into different areas and each area provided different services. The Hmong discovered which areas had better

services and moved to those areas so that they could receive those services. The most important social services they looked for were government assistance programs, training programs, and education programs (Thao, 1999). Dr. Vang Pobzeb (2001, n.p.) stated that “many Hmong Americans moved from California to Minnesota and Wisconsin and other states because of the problems of welfare reforms and unemployment problems.” After this secondary migration, most Hmong lived in California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin.

From 1975 to now the total Hmong population is 300,000. To this date approximately 80,000 Hmong people live in Wisconsin; 80,000 live in Minnesota; 70,000 live in California; and 70,000 live in the rest of the country. The Hmong people are a very small minority in the United States, and they are easily overlooked by many government agencies and political leaders. This in turn is one of many reasons why the Hmong people have struggled in their assimilation into American society.

Hmong Culture/Family System

One major aspect of the Hmong culture that separates it from the many other cultures is its clan system. The Hmong society was based on the clans tracing their descent through the father, and is based on respecting the elders and ancestral ties (Flom, 1994). The Hmong clans are an extended unit of the family that includes all relatives on the male side. It is through the clan that disputes are settled and major decisions are made. Each clan has a leader who represents the clan and acts in its best interests. Currently there are 18 clans in the Hmong culture. All 18 can be found in the United States. The clans names are as follows: Fang, Hang, Her, Khang, Kong, Kue, Lo, Ly, Moua, Pha, Thao, Cha, Cheng, Chue, Vang, Vue, Xiong, and Yang (Pobzeb, 1992). The Hmong clan system provides the Hmong people with a sense of belonging or a social identity. It also acts as a mediator to resolve disputes that occur in the local

community and it is used to make decisions that effect the whole community. Overall, it is a form of local government for the Hmong (Pobzeb, 1992).

What helps to keep the Hmong clan system so effective is the traditional family structure. The family is considered the most important part of the Hmong culture. “Hmong culture traditionally has followed strict socialization practices, with an emphasis on conformity and following situation specific traditional customs or practices” (Shade, 1997, p. 111). Extended families living together are normal for the Hmong family. Respect is given to the elders and clan leaders and whatever they say is followed, even when it comes to personal decisions (Shade, 1997). Each member of the family has a role. The Hmong men typically are the laborers. They will farm and hunt for food and protect the family. The women stay close to home and take care of the family. In the Hmong family, boys are more favorable than girls. Also, girls and boys are not allowed to touch each other unless they are married. They are to remain separated at all times. The Hmong also have a traditional marriage practice that is used throughout the clans. According to Vang Pobzeb (1991, p. 6), “the purpose of the clan system is to maintain marriage systems.” This shows how important and serious marriage is in the Hmong culture. The first rule when it came to marriage was that a Hmong person could never marry within the clan. They were to marry someone from another clan, and for Hmong families it was common practice to have arranged marriages for their sons and daughters. “When a man and woman marry, she leaves her clan and joins with his clan, with the husband being the boss of the family” (Flom, 1994, p.18). In many situations Hmong boys and girls are married by the time they are just beginning their teenage years. As soon as two people are married, they start to have children. It is for this reason that many Hmong girls are pregnant at a very young age. In the American

culture, this would be seen as a bad situation, but in the Hmong culture this is normal and expected.

Religion has also played an important role in traditional Hmong life. The Hmong retained a traditional belief system based on animism, ancestral worship, and shamanism (Trueba, Jacobs, & Kirton, 1990). Over time, some Hmong were influenced by other religions such as Christianity, Buddhism, and Confucianism. For those who believed in ancestral worship, it was accepted that there were spirits of family members and specific rituals were followed in honoring those spirits. Shamanism was an important aspect of this religion. It was believed that shamans had powers to cure sicknesses and to rid families of evil spirits. To this day many Hmong families still practice ancestral worship and shamanism (Trueba, Jacobs, & Kirton, 1990).

Based on the information provided, it can be seen that the Hmong culture and family system is based on traditional rules and guidelines that have been followed for many generations. It is these traditions that have caused a lot of stress on Hmong families as they live in an American culture that is extremely different and less traditional. Vang Pobzeb (1992, p. 52) stated in his research that, “Hmongs tend to claim that the problems of family breakdown and divorce rates in America are directly caused by American cultural freedom and cultural determination.” Women are faced with the biggest and most difficult decisions as they become changed by American culture. It is difficult for Hmong women, especially girls to choose between the traditional culture and American culture. Many Hmong girls do not want to have children as a teenager, they want to have boyfriends, and they do not want to stay at home and help with the household chores. “If young Hmong girls eventually acculturate to American society the traditional divisions of labor in the home will erode” (Chi & Park, 1999, p. 223).

Hmong students under the age of 20 have said that they feel torn between remaining loyal to Hmong values and having freedom to make personal decisions based on their lives and not the family (Shade, 1997).

Hmong Students in Education

Education for the Hmong drastically changed when they relocated to the United States. The Hmong went from little or no education to a free and complicated educational system. Most of the Hmong people were farmers when they lived in Laos so a formal education was not needed. The few Hmongs who were wealthy and lived near larger cities were able to provide a formal education for their children. According to Meyer Weinberg (1997, p. 184) in his book *Asian-American Education*, he stated that “the wealthier Hmong were able send their children to schools located in large cities or to be taught by private tutors in the absence of local schools.” With little formal education, the majority of the Hmong people struggled in their adjustment to life in the United States. For Hmong children, the American school system was a world they had never encountered. Issues that Hmong students face in school are language barriers, different learning styles, cultural differences, and the structure of the American education system.

The biggest obstacle Hmong families must overcome in the American educational system is the language barrier. According to one expert in the field (Thao, 1999, p. 87) “the language barrier continues to impact the rate of adjustment for the Hmong at all levels.” The Hmong language is considerably different than the American language. Specifically, the major differences are that the Hmong language has fewer verbs, synonyms, and words (Shade, 1997). There are some things in the American society that the Hmong have no words to use to describe. According to Weinberg (1997), it is reading comprehension, reading vocabulary, and spelling that the Hmong have the greatest difficulty. One of the main reasons for these problems is that

the Hmong language never had a written form until the 1900's. "Between 1952 and 1964, four writing systems were created in Laos" (Weinberg, 1997, p. 194). This means that many parents and grandparents never grew up knowing how to read and write, and even if they did, there were four different styles they could have learned. Acquisition of the English language is critical to their adjustment to our society, their acceptance of new values, and their participation in public life (Trueba, Jacobs, & Kirton, 1990). Many of the Hmong students in the schools are second or third generation students, so language is not as difficult as it was in the past for their parents or grandparents. However, Hmong students are now faced with a different challenge. They must act as interpreters for their own parents. According to Trueba, Jacobs, and Kirton (1990, p. 10), "this forces bilingual children into a position of adult responsibility in making economic, social, medical, and other difficult personal decisions." Parents who do not know English feel that they have to stay behind the scene and obtain information through their children. This type of situation can cause problems because the traditional family structure is challenged and even destroyed, causing considerable tension in the family (Thao, 1999). The parents feel that they are in an inferior position with their children, which is completely opposite of their culture (Chi & Park, 1999). Instead of getting involved in their child's education, many parents choose to avoid working with the school so they can avoid being embarrassed. Being interpreters for the parents also effects the student's attendance at school. Whenever the parents or grandparents have doctor's appointments or special engagements in the community, they expect their child to come along to interpret. Some Hmong students are already struggling in school and cannot afford to be frequently absent (Thao, 1999).

Due to living in a different culture and having specific expectations from their families, many Hmong students have different learning styles and act differently than other students in

school. According to Shade (1997, p. 214), "Hmong children have no preconceived ideas about school. They respect their teachers and try to please them but are confused by classroom procedures." The main objective of the American schools is to teach students to think things out for themselves. They are encouraged to ask questions when they are confused and it is all right to have a wrong answer to a question as long as you learn from your mistakes. The American schools also put an emphasis on competition and recognition (Thao, 1999). The Hmong culture has not provided the students with the tools necessary to succeed in the American school system. Hmong students are not accustomed to asking questions or being singled out. According to Chi and Park (1999), students are not encouraged to challenge the intelligence or knowledge of their teachers. The Hmong students are taught at an early age to respect and obey their elders. They have been taught to accept the teachings of adults and that silence is respectful. Questioning their rules and authority would be extremely disrespectful and the students would be severely punished (Shade, 1997). However, in the American schools, this type of behavior is sometimes tolerated and the punishment is less severe or non existent. According to Trueba, Jacobs, and Kirton (1990, p. 75), "as Hmong students try to adjust to school, while at the same time trying to maintain their attachment to home values, they often feel divided and unable to coop with demands from either school or home."

Parent expectations of schools is another issue that effects Hmong students. According to Shade (1997), "parents may have attitudes and values toward schooling that are at variance with those of the American school." Meyer Weinberg (1997) supported that statement when he stated that in the Hmong culture "educators were regarded as the children's 'second parents' and that they are responsible to educate 'the whole child' including their children's behavior." Many Hmong parents do not understand or feel that they should be a part of their child's education.

Also, many Hmong parents never had a formal education themselves so even if they did want to help their children, they would not know how. "Parents cannot help their children with school assignments and so Hmong children are left to strive for themselves" (Thao, 1999, p. 96). Hmong parents also have different expectations of their children than other parents. Trueba, Jacobs and Kirton (1990), stated in their research that Hmong parents expect their children to be advocates - questioning, complaining, and fighting for adequate care in schools. Some Hmong students are left to fight for themselves, while other students find more support from their parents. One way to increase Hmong parent involvement in school would be to have them share their culture with teachers, staff, and students. Another solution would be to hand out information on how they can help their children in the educational process that was in their native language (Trueba, Jacobs, & Kirton, 1990).

Another issue that Hmong students encounter in school is that many schools and educators do not know how to relate to Hmong students or meet their needs in the classroom. Trueba, Jacobs, and Kirton (1990, p. xi), found in their research that teachers felt ill prepared to change their teaching style and curriculum in order to accommodate Hmong students. Some teachers feel that they would have to completely change their style of teaching to meet the needs of Hmong students, and most are unwilling to change. Another issue that Hmong students must overcome in the schools is segregation. According to Shade (1997), there are two types of segregation: academic and social. Academic segregation occurs when students are placed in English Proficiency programs (LEP) and English as a Secondary Language (ESL) programs. The focus of the LEP and ESL programs is on the students' ability to speak and comprehend the English language so that they can be successful in schools. However, in some schools this is considered a place to put Hmong students who might speak fluent English, but struggle in class

due to other reasons. These reasons would include cultural differences such as not speaking in class, not socializing with other students in school, or not understanding how to function in a classroom. Socially, Hmong students are segregated when they are placed in the regular classroom, but isolated from American classmates. According to Shade (1997, p. 214), “despite enrollment of Hmong students in regular classes, the within-classroom social contact between American students and Hmong students can be severely limited, due partly to language and partly to cultural differences.” Also, many Hmong students are misunderstood by other American students due to social stereotypes and biases that American students bring from home. Putting Hmong and American students in the same classroom does not guarantee that there will be increased social interaction between students. Trueba, Jacobs, and Kirton (1990, p. 15) stated in their research that “the most important function of schools, that of socializing youth into American cultural values and preparing them to play a role in society has become more demanding and difficult.”

Schools and teachers who have found success in working with Hmong students have changed their curriculums and teaching styles to meet the needs of Hmong students. The instructional contents include more cooperative learning and visual and hands-on activities (Chi & Park, 1999). Cooperative learning is effective with Hmong students because they are brought up in a family structure that is cooperative in nature where everyone has a role and job to do in the family. Visual and hands on activities work well with Hmong students because Hmong students are taught by their families through demonstration and example. Finally, teachers and schools who have been successful in working with Hmong students have found that Hmong students respond to encouragement rather than to personal recognition (Shade, 1997).

Chi and Park (1997, p. 224) stated, that “living in a host culture with different values, codes, and acceptable behaviors, the Hmong youth find themselves caught between 2 cultures.” The Hmong youth have a difficult task ahead of them in trying to combine their Hmong culture with the American culture. As Paoze Thao (1999, p. 93) stated, “there is an adjustment process where some students compare their own ethnic cultural ego with aspects of the American culture ego to form a new ‘hybrid ego.’” Some Hmong students are finding that their families accept these changes while others discover that it will not be accepted by their elders. No matter what direction the Hmong people find themselves going, many understand that they have come to the crossroads and what direction they choose will affect the direction in which their lives will go.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter will describe how the subjects were chosen for this study, and the instruments that were used. It will also explain the data collection and analysis procedures. The chapter will conclude with the study's limitations.

Subject Selection and Description

The subjects of this study were 7th and 8th grade students in the Eau Claire School District. Forty students were stratified randomly selected from one middle school's choir classes in the city of Eau Claire, WI. Twenty Hmong students were selected from each grade level. Half of each set of 20 were male and the other half were female. The school's principal was contacted and approved the study prior to contacting students and families. Students were allowed to quit the study at anytime and the students' names remained confidential and were not used in the study.

Instrumentation

This researcher developed a survey to obtain specific information needed for this study. The survey was designed to collect descriptive information and was based on current research that was reviewed by this researcher. The questions were designed using a Likert scale and some short answer questions. The questions were made to be simple and easy to answer in a short amount of time. The survey consisted of 20 questions that gathered information about the students' age, daily routines in school, perceptions of the school's guidance program, and issues that deal with acculturation into the American culture. Because it was constructed specifically

for this study, there were no measures of validity or reliability. A copy of the finalized survey can be found in Appendix A.

Data Collection

Permission to participate from the parents and the students who were stratified randomly selected was sought before the survey was distributed. This occurred during the Spring semester of 2004. Students were given the survey during the school day, once permission had been obtained from the school, parents, and students. The students were provided passes to come to the music area during the school's Primetime study period. They were put in a room together and were given as much time as was needed to complete the survey. The survey took approximately 15 minutes. Upon completion of the survey, students handed it in to the researcher and returned to their classes.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, using percentages and frequencies, were used to analyze the data. This information was then used to address the research questions.

The chapters that follow will provide a presentation of the findings and discuss any conclusions based on the analysis of the results.

Limitations

One limitation of the research was that the sample size was small, therefore limiting the ability to infer the information to other 7th and 8th grade Hmong students. Another limitation was that the survey does not have any measures of reliability and validity.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the survey that was taken by the 7th and 8th grade Hmong students at Delong Middle School in April 2004. The students took the survey during the school day at the same time. The survey collected information about the students' perceptions and knowledge of the middle school guidance program in their school.

The first part of the chapter will discuss demographic information and item analysis. The chapter will conclude with the data collected to address the research questions.

Demographic Information

There were 40 middle school aged Hmong students who were contacted to participate in the study. Twenty of those students were male and 20 were female. Of those, 35 students agreed to participate. This constituted a return rate of 87.5%. Of the 35, 17 (48.6%) were female students and 18 (51.4%) were male. There were 4 (11.4%) who stated that they did not live in a traditional Hmong household and 31 (88.6%) stated that they did live in a traditional Hmong household.

Research Questions

Research Question #1 - Do Hmong students believe that school counselors can be helpful with their acculturation problems? Item 5 on the survey addressed this question. The survey showed that 31 (88.6%) felt that their guidance counselor could help them with the acculturation issues that they were facing in and out of school. Of the 35, 4 (11.4%) felt that the guidance counselor could not help them with their acculturation issues. The students were asked to explain how they felt the guidance counselors could help them. The most common response was

that the counselors could give them advice on how to handle specific situations. These situations included how to talk to parents, deal with friends, understand issues they faced, being picked on, and how to handle different feelings that they had experienced. Another common response was that the counselor could help with scheduling issues. The explanations of the students who felt that the guidance counselor could not help them with acculturation issues were that the counselor could not speak Hmong, their family would feel embarrassed by what they might say, and that they did not have any problems that would need to be dealt within school.

Research Question #2 - What are Hmong students' perceptions of how acculturation has affected their lives at home and school? Item 13 on the survey addressed this issue. Of the 35 surveys completed, 32 (91.4%) responded to the question. The question asked for the students to write their answer out in their own words. This resulted with the students responding to the question in many different ways. After seeing the responses, the researcher put the answers into four categories, which included language, no problems exist, social problems, and family and heritage issues.

Of the 32 responses, 9 (28.1%) responded that the language barrier between the two cultures was the biggest obstacle that the students had to face when combining both the American and Hmong cultures. Most of these students stated that they had to speak Hmong at home and English at school. This caused problems because it was hard to remember words from both languages and some students spoke better in one language than the other. The students also felt that it was hard to pronounce new words they learned in school and that it was extremely difficult to translate the two languages when they tried to explain situations and assignments to parents and teachers.

Nine (28.1%) out of the 32 students who responded to this question stated that acculturation had not affected them at all when they had to combine both the Hmong and American cultures.

Eight (25%) out of the 32 students felt that social differences were the biggest obstacle they faced when combining both cultures. Students described issues such as racism, dating, ethnic foods, friends who are different races, shyness, and how they communicate to teachers about problems they're facing. These students explained how they felt they were caught in the middle of the two cultures. They wanted to follow their Hmong culture and respect the duties they have with their families, but at the same time they wanted to participate in activities with other students. This is best explained when one student stated that "sometimes you are not Hmong enough for the Hmong and American enough for the Americans."

Six (18.8%) of the 32 stated that they had problems with the expectations their family and heritage put on them. Students described issues such as getting freedom from their families, family and clan obligations, always having to participate in Hmong social events, and parents not understanding why their children wanted to fit in with the other students at school. Overall, these students felt that they where obligated to spend all of their free time doing things with their family and Hmong friends and they did not have the opportunity to do things that other students were doing.

Research Question #3 - What social problems do Hmong students report facing in schools? Item 14 addressed this issue. Of the 35 surveys handed in, 34 (97.1%) responded to the question. The question asked for the students to write their answer out in their own words. Once again, this resulted with the students responding to the question in many different ways. After seeing the responses, the researcher put the answers into five categories, which included no

problems, family expectations, language barriers, being different, and understanding the functions of the school.

The results showed that the largest response out of the 34, was 10 (29.4%) who stated that they did not have any problems that were different than that of other students.

The next most common response was 8 (23.5%) whose comments stated that their family life was an issue other students did not have to face. Students described issues such as traditions, sexism between males and females, marriage issues, showing their feelings, forced to do things they do not want to do, and having different expectations from their parents. These students' comments showed that they are struggling with keeping the old family/clan traditions and living a lifestyle that is the same as the rest of the culture their friends at school follow.

Six (17.6%) of the 34 stated that language was something that other students did not have to face. Students described issues such as translating for their parents, speaking Hmong at home and English at school, not understanding English enough to do well in school, and having an accent.

Being different was another category that 6 (17.6%) out of 34 Hmong students felt was an issue that other students did not have to face. Students described issues such as racism based on how they looked and talked, people making up words to make fun of them, and eating different food in the cafeteria. These students stated that because they did things differently and looked different, other students and teachers did not treat them as equals.

The lowest response was understanding the functions of the school, which was 4 (11.8%) out of 34. These students felt that they did not fully comprehend why the school did things at times. Some of the students also stated that they did not understand the social rules of being friends with other students and the different interactions between students.

Research Question #4 - How do Hmong students use counseling services that are provided in schools? Items 4, 4b, and 4c on the survey addressed this question. In item 4 the students were asked if they had ever visited the school's guidance counselor. Over 71% (n=25) responded that they had visited the school's guidance counselor. Almost 29% (n=10) responded that they had not visited the guidance counselor.

Item 4b asked those students who had indicated visiting the guidance counselor, how many times they had visited. Of the 25 who responded they had visited, only 21 (84%) stated how many times. The results showed that the largest percentage, 66.7% (n=14), went 1-2 times. The second largest group, 23.8% (n=5), went 3 to 4 times. The third largest group, 5.7% (n=2), went 5 to 6 times.

Item 4c asked for the reasons why the students visited the school's guidance counselors. The results showed the largest percentage, 57.1% (n=20), went for scheduling issues. The second highest group was 11.4% (n=4) for issues with friends. The third largest group was 8.6% (n=3) for school issues and the fourth largest group was a tie between family issues and personal issues which were both 2.9% (n=1). Racial issues and other were two categories that did not receive any responses.

Research Question #5 - Are schools and their guidance departments meeting the needs of Hmong students? Items 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 on the survey addressed this question. These items used a Likert scale that asked students to rate specific statements using strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree, or strongly agree.

Item 6 asked if the students were satisfied with their school's guidance program. Thirty-four of the 35 students who participated answered the question. The results showed that the

largest percentage, 41.2% (n=14), agreed with the statement. The second largest percentage, 35.3 (n=12) were undecided, and the third largest percentage, 23.5 (n=8), strongly agreed.

Item 7 asked the students if they understood the services that the school guidance program could offer them. All 35 students responded to this question. The results showed that the largest percentage, 45.7% (n=16) agreed with the statement. The second largest percentage, 25.7% (n=9), strongly agreed. The third largest response, 22.9% (n=8), were undecided, and the fourth largest response, 5.7% (n=2), disagreed.

Item 8 asked if the students felt that the school's guidance counselors understood their needs and had the ability to help them through a problem. All 35 students responded to this question. The results showed that the largest percentage, 45.7% (n=16) agreed with the statement. The second largest percentage, 31.4% (n=11), were undecided. The third largest response, 20% (n=7), strongly agreed, and the fourth largest response, 2.9% (n=1), disagreed.

Item 9 asked if the school provided helpful resources when they needed to deal with problems. All 35 students responded to this question. The results showed that the largest percentage, 40% (n=14), were undecided. The second largest percentage, 31.4% (n=11), strongly agreed. The third largest response, 22.9% (n=8), agreed, and the fourth largest response, 5.7% (n=2), disagreed.

Item 10 asked if the students had people they could talk to in school besides the school counselor who they would feel comfortable talking to about their problems. All 35 students responded to this question. The results showed that the largest percentage, 40% (n=14), strongly agreed with the statement. The second largest percentage, 28.6% (n=10), agreed. The third largest response, 22.9% (n=8), were undecided, and the fourth largest response, 8.6% (n=3), disagreed.

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the information reported in chapter 2 with the findings of the survey. It will also give conclusions to the findings and provide recommendations for further research.

Discussion

The survey showed that the language barrier is an issue for Hmong students at school and home. The largest percentage of students, 28.1% (n=9), stated that language was a problem they faced when trying to live in both the Hmong and American cultures. Over 17% (n=6) also stated that the language barrier was an issue that they faced everyday in school. A student's response in the survey was (#13, 26 Appendix B), "Some of my problems are when I am home my family talks in Hmong and then I have to talk in Hmong because my parents don't talk much English. I have trouble talking in Hmong." Thao (1999) found that this is one of the biggest obstacles Hmong students and families must overcome in the American school system. The researcher (Trueba, Jacobs, & Kirton, 1990) also found that most Hmong students could speak and write in English at a level that would allow them to succeed in school, unlike their parents, who for the most part still cannot read or write in English. This difference between the students' and parents' understanding of English has led to a new problem the language barrier has created for students. Trueba, Jacobs, & Kirton (1990) stated that Hmong students now act as translators when their parents and the school need to communicate with each other. A student's response in the survey stated (#13, 15 Appendix B), "Like whenever my teachers try to talk to my parents and they don't understand." Another student's response stated (#13, 7 Appendix B), "that it is

really hard to translate.” Students are being put in a position that is uncomfortable. By being translators they are put in a position that makes them equals with their parents and in some cases Hmong parents feel inferior to their own children. When this happens, some parents will typically get less involved with their child’s education and the student will avoid situations where they need to translate for their parents. These types of feelings can lead to an unhealthy attitude and disinterest in school for both the parents and students.

The students’ responses indicated that they also have to overcome social differences in school. The survey showed that 28.1% (n=9) felt that social differences was the biggest problem they faced when trying to live in both the Hmong and American cultures. Shade (1997) found that the behaviors that are expected of Hmong students at home are different than the American culture the students live in outside of the home. The students’ responses in the survey agreed with that statement. One student stated (#13, 20 Appendix B), “the Hmong culture and American culture are two different things, like for us friends are only for school, but in America, friends are everything.” Hmong students are faced with having to walk that fine line between the two cultures’ expectations. Some are successful, while others struggle. One student who is struggling stated (#13, 8 Appendix B), “Sometimes you feel lost. Like you do not fit in anywhere. Of course I have Hmong friends, but then I have white friends as well. Sometimes you’re not Hmong enough for the Hmong and American enough for the Americans.” Dating was another social issue that students reported as being difficult when living between both cultures. One student simply stated (#13, 13 Appendix B), “dating different races” as a social problem. Shade (1997) agrees with this issue as being a problem because in a traditional Hmong family, there is not a lot or any kind of dating allowed between students. Arranged marriages are not as common as they used to be, but the traditional belief of marrying Hmong is still felt by

students. The students' responses in the survey also stated that they must overcome racial issues. The students did not provide specific details on how racism has affected them, but is something that they are aware of and experience. American and Hmong cultures are so different, it is hard for people to accept these differences.

The researcher (Shade, 1997) also found that Hmong families have different expectations of their children at school and home than most traditional American families. In the Hmong culture students are expected to participate in all Hmong celebrations and cultural rituals. Almost 19% (n=6) of students who took the survey agreed with the research when they stated that their family traditions and expectations caused problems for them when trying to live in both the Hmong and American cultures. When the students were asked what social problems they faced in school, 23.5% (n=8) stated their family life as the biggest problem. One student stated (#13, 14 Appendix B), "you want to go somewhere but you can't because a Hmong thing is going on at your house." Another student stated (#13, 33 Appendix B), "parents don't understand, they don't see why we want to do it or why we try hard to fit in." Thao (1999) found that many Hmong students are learning how to walk a fine line between the two cultures. They are being pulled in two different directions and they feel like they should be loyal to both. They want to respect their family's wishes and expectations, but at the same time they want to be like their friends.

Though students still have many issues to overcome when living in two different types of cultures, the survey showed that things might be improving for the Hmong students. In questions #13 and # 14 of the survey, they were asked what problems they face in school and what issues they face when combining the two cultures. The most common answer for both questions was that they did not have any problems. For question #13, 28.1% (n=9) stated no

problems existed and in question #14, 29.4% (n=10) also stated no problems existed. This indicates that Hmong students are starting to understand how to be successful at combining the two cultures. It may also suggest that parents and the school are starting to communicate better with the students and are understanding what they are going through and how they can help to make things easier. The survey indicated that there is starting to be a positive trend where both the Hmong and American cultures can exist together. The Hmong students can keep their Hmong heritage and values and at the same time fit in and be successful at school.

Hmong students are in need for someone they can turn to for help. At times it is difficult for students to talk to their parents and their friends because a lot of their issues involve those people. The survey showed that the students felt like they do have somewhere to turn and that place is the counseling area in their school. Nearly 89% (n=31) stated that they felt their school guidance counselor could help them if they needed help. Over 71% (n=25) stated that they have visited their counselor at school. The survey also showed that the majority of Hmong students know they can get help and that they are willing to go in to get help. Trueba, Jacobs, & Kirton (1990) stated how many educators did not know how to accommodate to the needs of Hmong students and yet in the survey the students never mentioned any issues they faced in the classroom and that they knew where to get help when they needed it. This is another example of how Hmong students are moving forward in a positive direction and how the schools are starting to successfully meet the needs of the Hmong families in their communities.

Finally, 64.7 % (n=22) of the students who took the survey stated that overall they were satisfied with the counseling program in their school, with the other 35.3% (n=12) stating they were undecided. Also, 68.6% (n=24) stated that they knew of someone other than the counselor in the school who could help them with their problems. These statistics once again show that the

students are starting to feel comfortable in their learning environment and are overcoming the communication difficulties that the research suggested existed.

Conclusions

The results of the study showed Hmong students still have many obstacles to overcome in terms of the language barrier, social differences, family expectations, and being successful in school. Though there were a few minor differences between the student survey and the research, overall there are many similarities between the sources.

The first conclusion is that though a language barrier exists for the Hmong students, the barrier is starting to change from one of understanding how to speak and write to be successful in school, to one of how to use both languages at school and home. Some students still struggle with English in school and in their work, but more students are expressing concerns of having to translate for their parents and that their parents do not understand when the school tries to communicate to them. The students also indicated that they are struggling with speaking Hmong at home with their parents.

The second conclusion is that Hmong students are struggling with the social differences between their families and school. At school, the social norms of friends and dating are different than what they see at home and with their own people. Students also have to overcome looking different, sounding different, and acting different than other students. To be accepted at both school and home, Hmong students need to have an understanding of who they are, where they came from, and have an understanding of the world they live in outside of the home. With appropriate guidance and resources, they will have a better opportunity of obtaining that acceptance.

The third conclusion is that Hmong students have different expectations put on them by their culture and families than other students. These students understand that they are being pulled in two different directions and that they need to learn how to function in both the Hmong and school environments.

The fourth conclusion is that Hmong students who took the survey demonstrated that they know they have places to turn for help. They know that the counselors in their school can help them and that they are not afraid to turn to them for help. Also, the students did not mention how the school was not meeting their needs, so it can be assumed that they felt comfortable with their learning environment.

In conclusion, Hmong students are still struggling with the differences between the Hmong and American cultures. Over time it seems that they are beginning to adapt more effectively and are starting to feel more successful. They perceive their school, and more specifically the counseling department, as a safe place to turn to for help and guidance. However, more needs to be done to meet their needs and not all students felt that they can be successful at school and home. More resources can be made available and more support can be provided by both the parents and school.

Recommendations to the Counselors and School

From the literature review and the survey, the following recommendations to the school district and counselors are given.

1. Provide after school programs or support groups that allow Hmong students to talk about the issues they face and how to work through those issues.
2. Provide before and after school tutoring programs or peer tutoring programs.
3. Encourage students to visit and talk to the counselors more often.

4. Provide Hmong mentors who understand the issues that they are going through and can help provide resources or ideas on how to think through their problems.
5. Provide different forms of communication with parents through the use of translators, letters going home in Hmong, and invite parents to come to school to help out in the classroom.

Recommendations to the Parents

From the results of this study, here are the following recommendations for the parents of Hmong students.

1. Provide the opportunity for your children to communicate how they feel and listen to their needs.
2. Explain to children about the history and traditions of your culture and why it is important to your family to follow those traditions.
3. Be informed about what is happening with your child at school and the progress they are making in the classroom.
4. Communicate ideas and concerns to the school you may have about your child's education.
5. Volunteer to go to the schools and educate the teachers, students, and administration about the Hmong culture and how it works.

Recommendations for Further Research

From the results of the study, the following recommendations are given for further research.

1. Study the effects of after school programs such as support programs or multicultural clubs.

2. Research the attitudes toward Hmong students of teachers, students, administration, and community.
3. Research the attitudes toward the schools from Hmong parents' perspectives.
4. Survey Hmong students from different schools and compare the similarities and differences in attitudes and beliefs.
5. Study the different perspectives of male and female Hmong students' attitudes and beliefs of the effects of acculturation in our society.

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Appendix A

SURVEY

Directions: Please mark (x) on the appropriate place.

1. Sex Male Female

2. Age 10 11 12 13 14

3. Would you consider your family a traditional Hmong family? Yes No

4. Have you ever visited your school's guidance counselor? Yes No

4a. If you answered no to question 4, did you have any reasons on why you did not use the counseling services? Please explain in the space provided

Then go to question #5

4b. If you answered yes to question 4, about how many times?

1-2 3-4 5-6 7-10 10 or more

4c. For what reason(s) did you visit your school counselor? Please check all that apply.

Issues with Friends School Issues Schedule Changes/Ques.

Family Issues Personal Issues Racial Issues

Other, please explain if possible. _____

5. Do you believe that school counselors can help you with issues you might encounter at home or school? Yes No

5a. If yes, how? _____

5b. If no, why not? _____

Directions: Please indicate how you see the following statements apply to you from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Circle “5” if you strongly agree with the statement. Circle “4” if you agree with the statement. Circle “3” if you are undecided about the statement. Circle “2” if you disagree with the statement. Circle “1” if you strongly disagree with the statement.

1-SD-Strongly Disagree

2-D-Disagree

3-U-Undecided

4-A-Agree

5-SA-Strongly Agree

	S	D	U	A	SA
6. I am satisfied with my school's guidance program.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I understand the services that my school guidance program can offer.	1	2	3	4	5
8. My school guidance counselor understands my needs and has the ability to help me through my problems.	1	2	3	4	5
9. My school provides helpful resources when I need to deal with problems.	1	2	3	4	5
10. There are people in school besides the school counselor who I feel comfortable talking to about my problems.	1	2	3	4	5
11. My families expectations of me at school are the same as my teachers expectations.	1	2	3	4	5
12. My family is supportive of my education.	1	2	3	4	5

PLEASE PROVIDE BRIEF ANSWERS TO THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS. USE THE BACK OF THE SHEET IF MORE SPACE IS NEEDED.

13. What are some problems you face when trying to combine your Hmong culture with the American culture?

14. What issues do Hmong students face that other students do not have to deal with?

15. How can school counselors help Hmong students more effectively?

16. What type of programs would you like to see being offered that can help Hmong students with issues that they face everyday?

Appendix B

Answers to research question #13.

1. When I do that I forget my Hmong words little by little.
2. I don't have a problem
3. The American culture for me is more different than the Hmong culture. They think we eat different from them.
4. The freedom my parents don't give me.
5. Racism
6. Talking to American and Hmongs
7. That it is really hard to translate.
8. Sometimes you feel lost. Like you do not fit in anywhere. Of course I have Hmong friends, but then I have white friends as well. Sometimes you're not Hmong enough for the Hmong and American enough for the Americans.
9. I'm a little shy to talk with them
10. Well I can't say much but it is hard trying to do things like going to church when I am not a church person.
11. There are not many problems when I combine Hmong and American culture.
12. Hmong culture is different from American culture.
13. Dating different races and language.
14. You want to go somewhere but you can't because a Hmong thing is going on at your house.
15. Like whenever my teachers try to talk to my parents and they don't understand.
16. Some are that we are all humans just different colors. We all celebrate holidays.
17. I don't have any, except when I try to say or write a new thing.
18. None. Because I can handle both evenly.
19. People don't respect me at times, when I try to show my own culture.

20. The Hmong culture and American culture is too different things like for us friends are only for school, but in America friends are everything.

21. No, I don't have any problems at school. It's hard when you live where Hmong culture is so little. You have to do what is expected out of you for you're the Hmong Heritage.

22. None, I guess I could handle both.

23. Always doing more stuff and that's it.

24. None

25. Some people talk to me differently sometimes.... Maybe cause they think we don't understand English, which we do.

26. Some of my problems are when I am home, my family talks in Hmong and when I talk I have to talk in Hmong because my parents don't talk much English. I have trouble talking in Hmong.

27. Some families had a hard time because they didn't really know how to speak the American language.

28. None

29. It is hard for my parents because they don't really know how to speak in English very well.

30. Hmong culture is a lot different from the American culture because something we did culture a long time ago.

31. When trying to pronounce words that are too long to know or too hard to understand or know how to say it.

32. None

33. Parents don't understand. They don't see why we want to do it or why we try hard to fit in.