IMPACTS OF PARTICIPATION IN Hmong AS WORLD LANGUAGE CLASSES ON OUTCOMES FOR Hmong American High School Students

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DISSERTATION

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A Dissertation

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IMPACTS OF PARTICIPATION IN HMONG AS WORLD LANGUAGE CLASSES
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I certify that this student has met the requirements for format contained in the University
format manual, and that this dissertation is suitable for shelving in the library and credit is
to be awarded for the dissertation.

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Carlos Nevarez, Ph.D. Date
DEDICATION

For my parents, Nom Yeeb Vaj (Nao Ying Vang) and Maiv Yaj (Mai Yang), who first believed in the value of formal schooling and who helped to build the very first elementary school in our village in the high mountain of Laos and had to work hard to send me to school at the age of seven

and

For my wife, Maiv Xis Lauj (See Lor), for her love, her continued support for my education and for my three children: Ntsa Iab (Victoria), Tswj Fwm (Patrick) and Nkauj Hlub (Sage), for their love, support, and understanding
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I made the decision to leave my job of ten years as a Student Achievement Specialist to pursue my doctoral degree not because I wanted to do less, but because I wanted to do more than just waiting for someone else to present me with ideas and assignments that have very little impact on student learning and achievement. I entered the program with high hopes of beginning a new chapter in my professional career, pursuing what I enjoy most; creating quality and equitable educational opportunities for students where they can learn and discover the joy of learning through knowing who they are so that they can succeed in school and in life.

My journey through the Doctorate Educational Leadership and Policy Studies took me through various roadblocks and hardships that left me feeling disappointed, frustrated, and uncertain at time. For instance, during the program, my wife and I were pleasantly surprised by the arrival of our little girl, Skyla KaShia Vang, after fifteen years. Unfortunately, she left us just as unexpectedly as she had come to us; she was a great loss.

As my doctoral studies continued, there were other challenges such as the costs, personal and financial of pursuing such an all-consuming goal, took their toll on both me and my family. I knew the research I wanted to do and the situation I wanted to study, but I struggled to find the proper guidance and support for my vision. I knew that there was an important story of resiliency and cultural renewal taking place around the Hmong as World Language program, which I had helped to initiate before beginning my doctoral
studies. Yet, it was not clear to me how the tools of academic research and writing that I was learning could be adapted to study that story. This uncertainty as to method and approach ultimately caused some delays and more than a little discouragement.

Dr. Rosemary Blanchard (Doctoral Dissertation Committee Chair) could not have come into my life at a better time. She was extremely knowledgeable about how to turn stories into data and she shared my vision of education for Hmong Americans. Dr. Blanchard took me under her wings and began supporting and guiding me in a direction that was purposeful, meaningful, and helpful for conducting my research and creating my study. She had high expectations of me and made me work extremely hard. She did not let up; yet she never left me to sink or swim on my own. She spent countless hours and late nights, way past midnight, helping me to organize my ideas and reading and editing my work. Just as important, she knew when to let go, because she understood that this was a Hmong story that only a Hmong American scholar could fully develop. Through a combination of hands-on mentoring and hands-off non-interference, she molded me into that scholar. Both I and this study have benefitted from her profound support, guidance, understanding, and wisdom. I thank her with all my heart for believing in me and for seeing the beauty of the students in this story of the Hmong as World Language class. I am forever indebted to her.

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to grow as students, as community members and as citizens. Your approval was
necessary for these courses to become a part of the public school experience of our
children. The benefits demonstrated in this study remind us all that there is still more
work for us to do together to make appropriate educational opportunities available for all
Hmong American children.
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As an ally of the United States during the Vietnam War, my father fought bravely along with his fellow warriors for freedom. As a shaman he has crossed the many dimensions of both the spiritual and physical world to heal the human soul and body. As for my mother, she has always been encouraging and supportive. Her love and caring nature is what makes her irreplaceable to me. Thanks to both of my parents for their undying support, hope, and dreams for me. I hope that I have lived up to your expectations as a son in this life-time. Thanks to my brothers and sisters for your love and support. Thanks, especially to my brother Cher and his wife May for your material support during the last semester of this program. It has been a long journey and I could not have achieved my doctoral degree without all of you being in my life.

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Abstract

of

IMPACTS OF PARTICIPATION IN HMONG AS WORLD LANGUAGE CLASSES ON OUTCOMES FOR HMONG AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

by

William Vang

This study examines the consequences for urban Hmong American high school students of participating in two years sequences of high school level Hmong as World Language courses.

The Hmong population in the United States is a product of war, exile and resettlement at the end of the Vietnam War. Since their arrival, both the Hmong people and American social and political institutions have been trying to learn how to deal with each other more effectively and respectfully. One of the key American institutions engaging with the Hmong diaspora has been the public schools. This study explores one program in one public high school in north central California, initiated by Hmong educators themselves. The Hmong as World language program seeks to provide relevant academic education for Hmong American students by teaching Hmong as a “foreign language” for purposes of high school graduation and college admission requirements.

Some of the most important issues facing young Hmong Americans include not having access to quality and equitable educational opportunity and losing their ethnic and cultural identity and language as they go through school. The results are often low academic performance in school or dropping out altogether. These pressures also push
many young Hmong Americans away from their families and their traditions and into negative live choices which further disrupt the Hmong community (Cha, 2010; O’Reilly, 1998).

The Hmong migrations to the United States are recent. Therefore, studies of Hmong educational attainment and cultural endurance in the United States are fairly new. However educational researchers and especially new Hmong scholars are beginning to identify factors that contribute to the problems faced by this group of students and to their success. Vang’s (1998) study showed a correlation between cultural retention and students’ academic achievement. Hutchinson (1997) and Rumbaut (1989) reported that connectedness to Hmong culture positively affected educational performance of Hmong American youth. Moreover, Ngo and Lee (2007) report many findings that Hmong and other Southeast Asian students who adopt a strategy of accommodation without assimilation are the most successful (See also, McNall, et al., 1994 and Lee, 2005).

This study is ground in Yosso’s (2005) theory of community cultural wealth. Yosso identifies six forms of community capital which together constitute a pool of community cultural wealth that minority students, such as the Hmong American students in this study can draw upon.

The study employed both qualitative and quantitative analyses. These included statistical analysis of the relationship between participation in Hmong as World Language (HWL) instruction and other measures of high school success and in depth
analysis of interviews and focus group dialogues with teachers of HWL and recent graduates who had taken HWL.

Both quantitative and qualitative analyses found that taking HWL for two years had many positive outcomes for students and no identifiable negative consequences. Positive academic outcomes included improvements in high school GPA and increased skill and confidence performing academic work in all subjects. An additional educational outcome was students’ confidence and optimism about future educational and career plans.

Positive outcomes for the students outside of school included strengthening their relationship with family, community and culture. Students born in the United States who took two years of HWL talked of coming back home to their Hmong identity and families. Students born in Thailand, recent arrivals from the closure of the last Vietnam era refugee camps, insisted that the HWL classes helped them learn how to navigate the system of American high school requirements.

This study demonstrates the importance of incorporating the strengths of the Hmong American community into the education of their children and confirms the power of heritage language to bind a community together and to develop high level thinking in bilingual, bicultural students. The study concludes with recommendations for expanding the availability of Hmong language studies to other schools and grade levels with identifiable Hmong student populations and for further research on the educational journey of Hmong students in the United States and globally.
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The demand for accountability in the public schools has put tremendous pressure on California schools to improve their academic scores at all levels. However, significant achievement gaps remain between students in high-performing and low-performing school districts, and between white and African American students, English proficient students and English learner students. In this push for accountability as measured by test scores, many less quantifiable question of accountability have often been lost – questions of the relevance of curricula and teaching styles for the various communities of students, questions regarding the communities to which the school and district are accountable. With these more comprehensive questions of accountability unanswered, it continues to be a tremendous challenge for schools to demonstrate competency in meeting the needs of all students, including Hmong American students.

Hmong American students are relatively newcomers to the United States. Their journey into the public schools has occurred with little preparation for the encounter either on the part of the school districts or on the part of the students and their families, who began arriving in the 1970s as political refugees from the region of a secret side of the Vietnam conflict. This study offers opportunities for teachers, schools, and school districts to maximize Hmong American students’ learning potentials through the
implementation of various educational strategies that encompasses the inclusion of their culture, history, and language.

For immigrant children, learning English as a second language and dealing with school successfully are just one set of problems. Maintaining their first language, preserving their sense of worth and their cultural identities, and valuing their family connections as they become assimilated into the school and society have all become quite challenging for them. Often time, what is at stake is not only their educational development, but also their psychological and emotional well being as individuals (Cummins, 1996). For instance, Hmong children often start using English almost exclusively outside of the home as soon as they start learning just enough conversational English. Before long, they are speaking English at home, even with parents or grandparents who do not understand the language. If the parents do not realize that this shift in language behavior signals a change in the children's language loyalty, English will supplant the family language completely in the children's speech (Fillmore, 2000).

For most Hmong American students, the struggle to maintain good academic standing is a continuous struggle, especially at the secondary school level. Vang (2005) found that the academic achievement of Hmong American students declines exceptionally in secondary school when compared to patterns of performance in primary and middle schools. He also finds that the average Grade Point Average (GPA) of Hmong American students are 3.75 for ninth grade; 3.07 for 10th grade; 2.96 for 11th grade; and 3.05 for 12th grade. Although the overall academic achievement of Hmong
American students decreases in secondary school, it is also critical to acknowledge that there are many Hmong American students who are also accelerating. The overall goal of the present study is to explore the factors associated with academic success in Hmong high school students, and thereby contribute to the eventual elimination of the academic achievement gap of Hmong American students.

The problem with the current K-12 educational system in the country is that it does not serve all students. More specifically, in California, the educational system has not been helping Hmong American high school students to excel in school and to perform at their peak levels. Hmong American high school students have not made adequate progress in schools as expected by the federal legislation No Child Left Behind, which was signed into law by former President Bush in 2001. For the past several years, the number of Hmong American students who have been classified as English Learners outpace the number of Fluent English Proficient Hmong students (Vang & Hmong, Mien, and Lao Advisory Committee, 2004). This data draws a dire conclusion that the learning approach of schools are not meeting the needs of Hmong American students and new strategies and/or programs must be put in place in order to help these students excel and strive for academic success.

It is obviously beneficial to find feasible and authentic solutions to address the academic needs of Hmong American students, especially in the secondary levels. As future contributors to the communities that they live in, it is crucial for them to thrive and be successful in school. Even though there has been progress made in education for
Hmong American students in some states such as California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, which have developed a few charter schools that focus more on the Hmong culture, history, and language and educational programs such as Hmong as World Language classes and/or Hmong as World Language courses challenge tests, data still shows that they are still among the lowest achieving students in the public school system.

According to the article “U.S. Teens Lag as China Soars on International Test,” fifteen-year-olds in the U.S. ranked 25th among peers from 34 countries on a math test and scored in the middle in science and reading (Hechinger, 2010). The reality is that the United States is a country of immigrants. Hmong American students along with many other immigrant children are among the next generations of this great nation. Policy makers, educator, schools, and districts must rethink and do what is best for all children in order to stay competitive both domestically and globally.

This study explores the impacts of participation in Hmong as World Language Classes on Hmong American high school students in a particular high school in an urban school district in north central California. The Hmong as World Language class (HWL) is the only class in the district’s high schools that specifically offers Hmong American high school students the opportunity to learn their language, history, and culture as a part of their regular education and most importantly, to preserve their identity. This study presents a comprehensive and extensive body of existing research pertaining to the development of academic success of Hmong American students, especially those who are struggling at the secondary school levels. Furthermore, it also offers practical teaching
and learning strategies for teachers, schools, and districts on how to best meet the needs of Hmong American students so that they can excel academically across subject areas and thrive in all the communities of which they are a part.

Theoretical Frames

The research study is grounded on several theories. Each theory plays a significant role and/or provides a brief glance at the relevancy that it has on the academic struggles and/or success of Hmong American students. Furthermore, the framework acts as the foundation for which this research study is built upon in order to provide relevant support and information. In this research, the theoretical framework includes the following theories: critical race theory, theory of incompatibilities, and cultural capital and community cultural wealth theory. Each theory will be discussed more in depth in Chapter two and will be related directly to the research being studied.

Hmong

Hmong immigrate to the United States from Laos and Thailand due to unrest political persecution by the communist. It was a great price to pay for fighting alongside the United States of America during the Vietnam War. Those who fought against communism were singled out and were forced to resettle in other Western countries such as the United States, Australia, France, and Canada. In order to understand Hmong Americans’ struggles and challenges in America, it is essential to learn and understand their unique history and culture. To understand the struggles and challenges of Hmong
American students, it is significant to learn and understand everything about them. Few people are aware of their history, culture, and their language difference and the important role each factor plays in helping them learn and achieve in the mainstream culture and school system. In chapter two, the Hmong history, culture, language, and belief system will be discussed further in detail. Its intention is to give an overall understanding of the impact these factors can have on the learning and achievement of Hmong American students, especially at the high school level.

**Academic Barriers for Hmong American Students**

During the last decade or so, groups of Hmong individuals have become successful businessmen and businesswomen. Many have achieved great heights in owning their own homes and building their American dreams for their families. For most part, many Hmong children are succeeding in the public educational school system and moving on to attaining a higher education at the university level. However, data continues to show that Hmong American students, especially those in the secondary school levels, are failing at a significant rate. Chapter 2 will examine the barriers that are most influential to Hmong Americans students. Alienation and cultural conflicts faced at school by these children create a barrier to successfully adapt and learn where they often find themselves ambivalent about their self-worth and identities. Chapter two will also elaborate on several research studies that express the incompetency of school officials and institutions to provide quality educational service to this minority group and how language and cultural barriers have caused many students to struggle and fail in school.
Sources of Strength in Hmong American Culture and Community

Bourdieu (1986) reported that students come to school with different cultural experiences and these experiences facilitate the interactions students have with schools and influence their academic performance. Building on this theme, Cardenas and Cardenas (1977), concluded that the failures of cultural and language minority students can often be attributed to a lack of compatibility between the characteristics of minority children and the characteristics of a typical instructional program. While these analyses highlight the ways in which schools as typically organized tend to favor students with certain cultural experiences, they fails to take into account the sources of strength found in the diverse cultural communities in which racial, ethnic and language minority students live. Yet these strengths, the community cultural wealth of communities of color contain resources which support their children as they pursue their education and seek their place in the world (Yosso, 2005).

Hmong American students come to schools with their own set of values and unique learning styles. It is important to understand that building upon their strengths will support their academic success in the long run. Hmong American students’ learning experiences involve such strategies as oral repetition and memorization, cooperative group work to get a task done, and/or learning through practice or by doing. Resiliency, high respect for adults, and industriousness are just a few of some of the strengths that teachers and schools can draw upon from Hmong American students to promote their
own learning and achievement in school. Chapter two will explore more in depth the sources of strengths in the Hmong American culture and community.

*Strategies for Raising the Academic Achievement of Hmong American Students*

This research examines some of the most effective and efficient teaching strategies for Hmong American students across grade levels. Some practical and effective ways to meet the needs of Hmong students include: providing background knowledge, modeling, and offering opportunities to practice on what has been learned. Another factor that affects academic achievement and success for Hmong American students is also in direct and explicit instruction where instructions are clear, systematic, and engaging with ample opportunities for students to practice for success. Existing studies indicate that many Hmong-American students are academically more successful when their culture, history, and language are sustained, maintained, and valued. Academic and cultural background issues are discussed more in depth in chapter two of this study.

*Home Language Formal Instruction and Academic Acculturation*

In this study, several cultural and academic variables are examined in order to attempt to better understand the impact of participation in Hmong language classes for Hmong American high school students. In addition, research has also indicated that Hmong American students are in need of intense and meaningful academic curricula if they are to succeed beyond secondary education. Only a small percentage of Hmong American students have acquired the academic skills needed for post-secondary academic
tasks. This study explores the efficacy of using the academic study of the Hmong language at the high school level to help build academic skills that students can then apply to other academic areas. Hmong youth have also been found to acquire English as a second language better if they have a strong foundation of their primary Hmong language such as reading. Further studies also show that cognitive development in second language acquisition is influenced by the native language literacy level of the students. The Hmong language formal instruction and academic acculturation concept will be elaborated further in Chapter 2.

Problem Statement

When looking at Asian American students as a group, the whole population tends to perform well academically in school (Rosin, Wilson, & EdSource, 2008). However, when the data are disaggregated into different Asian American subgroups, Hmong American students are among some of the lowest performing students in school (Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, 2008). The special report of the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (2008) points out that Asian Americans constitute 12% of all ELLs nationwide even though they are only 5% of the total population. They account for over 10% of state ELL populations in 28 different states, including some of the states with the largest ELL populations—California (15%), New York (13%), and New Jersey (12%). Zhao and Qiu (2009) argue that educational leaders, policy makers, and educators must make efforts to treat each student as an independent
individual because not all Asian subgroups have the same performance patterns. Consequently, it is essential to look at the subgroups under “Asians” in order to have a more accurate, fair, and meaningful understanding of the achievement of Hmong American students when it comes to academic achievement. For instance, the 2007 National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) data shows that Cambodian and Hmong American students had a higher dropout rate (7%) than did Chinese (2%) and Korean students (2%).

Indeed, historically, linguistically, culturally, and ethnically, Hmong Americans are different from other Asian American groups (Buley-Meissner & Her, 2006; Hamilton-Merritt, 1993). According to Walker (1989), home culture can influence the skill development, behavior and learning styles of Hmong American students. The specific pattern of underachievement of Hmong American students needs to be addressed. As an example of one pattern, a recent report showed that Hmong American students tend to perform better academically at the K-6 levels, but as they advance up the grade levels, their school performance decreases (Vang, & Hmong, Mien, and Lao Advisory Committee, 2004). Reports such as this provide realistic opportunities for all stakeholders to find feasible solutions that continue to guide these students toward academic success at all levels.

According the U.S. Census Bureau 2009 American Community Survey in Table 1, 38.3% of the Hmong alone or in any combination are still achieving less than a high school diploma. About 23% have completed high school education compared to the 29%
of the total population of the United States. The great news from the historical record is that a large number of Hmong Americans have pursued and obtained a college education. About 24.3% of the Hmong American populations have some college or associate’s degree and 11.1% have completed a Bachelor’s degree and 3.5% have completed at the graduate or professional degree level. The data indicates that once Hmong American students have completed their high school education, many of them will pursue a college degree. This pattern suggests an increase in the levels of academic achievement from the elementary level and proceeding through the middle and high school levels indicating that Hmong American students would have and would take advantage of ample opportunities to pursue a college education and to become highly productive and contributing citizens to the society at large.

Table 1

*Selected Population Profile: Hmong Alone or in Any Combination*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Hmong Alone or in Any Combination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>307,006,556</td>
<td>236,434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native (born in the US)</td>
<td>268,489,322</td>
<td>136,147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign born</td>
<td>38,517,234</td>
<td>100,287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population 3 years and over enrolled in school</td>
<td>81,173,053</td>
<td>103,204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school diploma</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>38.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate (includes equivalency)</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college or associate's degree</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate or professional degree</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009)
Despite all obstacles, careful attention must be given to ensure that all students are successful in learning and achieving in school. It is the intent of this study to identify and explore some of the factors, which are most closely related to the academic success of Hmong American high school students. Overall, this study strives to explore the effects of Hmong American students’ participation in at least two years of studying Hmong as a world language during their high school careers.

Originally, the researcher was focusing on the impact of studying Hmong as a world language on Hmong American high school students’ academic outcomes. However, in the course of researching this important question, the researcher has come to recognize that the phenomenon of participating in a Hmong language class in the school has outcomes that go far beyond just simple academic outcomes. The interconnections between Hmong American students’ school-based learning and their community based living are also impacted, as are the interactions between the school community and the community at large. This study will therefore, explore some of these broader effects as well.

Nature of the Study

This research study involved mixed methodology: 1) qualitative data collected from a focus group interview with eight young Hmong Americans and an interview with two Hmong American high school bilingual teachers; and 2) quantitative data of existing students’ academic records retrieving from the ABC School District’s database. The
population of participants included young Hmong Americans who have recently graduated from BB High School in the K-12 ABC School District in northern California. The young Hmong Americans were classified into two groups: former high school students who took at least two years of Hmong as World Language (HWL) courses and students who did not take the two years of HWL at the high school. Eight former high school students who completed the two years of HWL courses were invited to participate with the student focus group interviews. The selection of students could not follow a random selection process since students were selected and located after graduating from high school and agreed to participate in a focus group process. However, all students selected came from the population of students whose academic data was analyzed in the quantitative part of the study. Furthermore, the interview for the two Hmong American bilingual teachers was conducted bilingually together on the same day and at the same location, but separately from the focus group interview, the young Hmong Americans.

Why do some Hmong American high school students succeed in school despite challenges such as poverty and learning English as a second language? This research seeks to address this larger question, at least in part, by examining the various factors affecting the educational outcomes of Hmong American high school students who participated in at least two years of studying Hmong as a world language during their high school careers. Specifically, the research addresses the following two questions:

1. What are the impacts of participation in the Hmong language classes on outcomes for Hmong American high school students? Does the completion of
the two years of Hmong language courses have any correlation with or impact upon various measures of student achievement such as students’ high school graduation, Grade Point Average (GPA), California Standardized Test results in English Language Arts (ELA) and Math, and school attendance? Does participation in the study of Hmong world language in high school show impacts beyond these academic measures?

2. What differences in demographic characteristics can be identified among Hmong American students in this sample who choose to take two years of Hmong world language in high school and are these differences related to differences in impact?

The outcomes of this study will provide valuable information for teachers, administrators, educational policy makers and/or school guidance counselors in identifying what educational models and teaching strategies are most effective for Hmong American students. The study will also provide valuable information to parents and community leaders in the Hmong American community who seek to foster the development of Hmong American young people and the continued revitalization of the Hmong American communities within the United States.

The purpose of the study was to learn more about the various factors affecting the developmental and educational outcomes of Hmong American high school students in ABC School District, an urban comprehensive K-12 school district in Northern California. In particular, the research explored the effects of Hmong American students’
participation in at least two years of studying HWL courses during their high school careers. In conducting this research, the researcher examined student outcomes from several sources and using both quantitative and qualitative methods. These included:

1. an analysis of regularly-maintained data from the urban school district
2. analysis of the insights and experiences of teachers who teach Hmong as a world language in an urban California public high school and
3. the use of thick description to identify themes and explore the meanings of the experiences shared in a focus group setting young adult Hmong Americans who successfully completed their high school career after having participated in a Hmong language class

The researcher has sought to identify resiliency factors that positively affect school outcomes for Hmong American students and, in particular, the role which the formal study of their Hmong language plays in developing resiliency. In addition, the research provides insight into the role of Hmong language study on strengthening young Hmong Americans’ connectedness with their home community and their successful adaptation to the larger American society.

Researchers have choices of methodology to conduct their studies at the present time. For example, researchers can choose from which point of view to investigate phenomenon: a qualitative perspective (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), a quantitative perspective (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002), or a mixed methods combination of the two perspectives (Dellinger & Leech, 2007, p. 309). One of the social science research
approaches that encourage the integration of two major methodological approaches such as quantitative and qualitative is a mixed method. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) contend that in this method the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study. Due to the limited nature of Hmong American students’ achievement data and the complexity of the many dimensions of these students’ lives that are affected by their development within the school context, the community context, and the family context, which within the dynamics are the larger society, it is best for this study to use a mixed method of study. The theoretical base of this mixed method of qualitative data collected from teachers and students interviews and quantitative analysis of student achievement records is grounded in the work of Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) and Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2010). They argue that one of the best ways to address a gap in literature is through a mixed method of study.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is drawn upon the existing research that provides understanding and directions for improving the academic achievement of Hmong American students. The following theories provide the theoretical/conceptual foundation and framework underpinning this study: critical race theory, theory of incompatibilities, and cultural capital and community cultural wealth theory.
First, critical race theory (CRT) is a movement in America legal scholarship that studies race, racism and power. It originated in American law schools and evolved in the early 1970s as a form of opposition scholarship concerned with racism facing people of color within educational institutions (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Through CRT, schools can improve its educational programs by providing equitable educational opportunities for all students, including, Hmong American high school students.

Second, according to Cardenas and Cardenas (1977), the Theory of Incompatibilities proposes that the failures of cultural and language minority students can be attributed to a lack of compatibility between the characteristics of minority children and the characteristics of a typical instructional program. One of the best ways to increase the academic performance of Hmong American students is to eliminate the incompatibility in the curriculum and instruction of the current programs. According to Shade (1997), “Hmong culture traditionally has followed strict socialization practices, with an emphasis on conformity and following situation –specific traditional customs or practices…Thus, Hmong culture was conducive to a field-dependent approach to learning” (p. 111). The characteristics of a field-sensitive style are: 1) a preference to work with others, 2) a need for external encouragement and guidance (extrinsic motivation), and 3) an orientation toward social cues and sensitivity to others. The following is a general guideline for working with Hmong American students (Shade, 1997):

Hmong American students are attuned to social cues and the responses of their classmates as well as their relationship with teachers. Working with students on a
one-on-one basis obviously enhances the teacher-student relationship. Hmong students orient to situation-specific guidance, demonstration, and instructions. Directions in traditional Hmong culture were situation specific and based on observational learning. For this reason, teachers should be precise in their instructions and in describing their assignments. All homework assignments should be given in written form and explained in class. Hmong students should be encouraged to ask questions about homework assignments before they leave the classroom. (p. 208)

Finally, cultural capital and community cultural wealth theory provides another important lens to understand the experiences of Hmong American students in American public schools. Bourdieu (1986) characterized cultural capital as convertible forms of knowledge, skills, education and advantages that a person has accumulated, which can improve their condition and/or status in society. However, while Bourdieu’s analysis provides a valuable lens for exploring the ways in which socio-cultural privilege is replicated through the supposedly democratic institution of public schooling, by itself it is static. If those that are in power and/or have the authority do not agree to change their cultural expectations for students entering school, the imbalance of cultural capital remains and even increases. In order to raise the academic achievement of language minority students, Yosso (2005) argues that six forms of capital, aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital reside in the students’ communities of origin. These forms of capital are not mutually exclusive or static, but rather are dynamic processes that build on one another as part of community cultural wealth that can support language minority students academically. When schools and educational institutions understand cultural capital and community cultural wealth,
trained professional educators will have better and meaningful resources and tools to educate and support their students, including Hmong American high school students.

These are appropriate lenses for looking at the problems facing Hmong American high school students because this study seeks to explore and understand the significance of Hmong identity of Hmong American adolescents, the role of Hmong language learning in cultural identity development and academic identity development, and the impact of incorporation of Hmong home language learning on the overall educational and life outcomes of Hmong Americans. More theoretical frameworks details will be fully discussed in Chapter 2.

Operational Definitions

Basic Intercommunication Skills (BICS)

Refers to students that still do not have the necessarily language skills to complete the academic tasks well and excel in the classroom (Crawford, 2004).

Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)

Refers to students who have mastered the Standard English language for formal academic reading and writing in the content areas such as math, science, social studies and English literature (Crawford, 2004)

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

A movement in American legal scholarship that studies race, racism and power. It originated in American law schools and evolved in the early 1970s as a form of
opposition scholarship concerned with racism facing people of color within educational institutions (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Community Cultural Wealth

Refers to educational resources in the students’ community to help students learn in school and to improve their personal character and includes aspiration, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005)

Cultural Capital

A convertible form of knowledge, skills, education and advantages that a person has accumulated, which can improve their condition and/or status in society (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu (1974) argues that the concept of cultural capital is important because it helps explain why social class influences school success.

Common Underlying Proficiency model (CUP)

Refers to the confirmation that there is an interdependent relationship between primary language proficiency and second language acquisition (Cummins, 2001). Specifically, the CUP model explains that skills, ideas, and concepts that students learn in their first language are transferable to the second language.

Focus Group Interview

Refers to collective conversations or group interviews. They can be small or large, directed or non-directed (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2005).
Hmong as World Language (HWL)

Refers to Hmong language courses that were developed and adopted by the ABC School District as a part of the World Language Classes that meet the high school graduation requirements at the high school levels.

Pearson’s Correlation

A measure of the strength between two linear dependent variables. The degree of relationship could be either positive or negative. It can range from -1 to 1.

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)

A widely use computer software program to perform statistical analysis in social science.

Thick Description

A method to conduct ethnography research. It describes a human behavior in a way that explains both the behavior and its context where in the end it becomes meaningful to an outsider. It is an alternative method for analyzing rituals, social behavior and symbols utilized by structural functionalists. Thick descriptions attempt to unearth all the layers of meaning and social significance of social interaction, symbols and rituals in order to weave a holistic understanding of what various aspects of society mean to those who participate within it (Geertz, 1973).
Zangle

Zangle Student Information System is a student information management software program for K-12 districts and their schools to accurately and efficiently manage all of their critical data and their administrative operations.

Assumptions

This study assumes that in a group interview process, the observations, insights and experiences of all of the participants can be fully drawn upon while at the same time, a richer level of understanding may arise from the interactions among the participants. This is completed by the following:

- By carefully following a standard interview protocol through the interview process (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 1995), all participants would have an equal chance and ability to respond to each question.

- By carefully applying Thick Description, as described by Geertz (1973): to ensure that the interpretation of cultures draws upon the multiple perspectives of the participants.

- By interviews conducted by a Hmong American researcher who lives in the same community and has a similar background to the students while working in the same school district thus encouraging respondents to provide true and accurate accounts and assure accurate translation where appropriate.
• Using Hmong or English languages to interview each participant and/or focus groups according to their preferences and abilities helping the participants provide as original and high quality information as possible.

Limitations

The study includes various limitations that arise from the data sources, the nature of the research and the situated position of the researcher.

• This is a quantitative and qualitative study conducted with a limited number of participants from one high school in a school district in northern California. Therefore, the results may not be generalized to other Hmong American students in other schools and districts.

• The quantitative data is a onetime snapshot of student outcomes. Therefore, it is not possible to follow trends over time. In addition, the data does not indicate in which academic year the students who took the Hmong language class studied it. Therefore, it is not possible to compare outcomes based upon when the students first began their formal study of Hmong.

• The total number of teachers and focus group participants are necessarily small in order to allow an in depth interview process. Therefore, the data drawn from these interviews and focus group may not be highly generalizable to other segments of the Hmong American community, although they may be highly suggestive for other researchers.
• The researcher, as a member of the Hmong American community and as an educator known to the subjects of the qualitative analysis is both inside and outside the data upon which he reports. The influence, if any, of the researcher’s personal characteristics and community identity cannot be determined, and while they provide a resource for this entire research process, may in some indefinable aspects affect it. The researcher makes no claim of objectivity in regard to the subject matter of this research. However, the researcher has sought by careful attention to best research practices to conduct this research with a strategic objectivity in regard to the analyses undertaken.

• The subjects were not selected randomly, further limiting the generalizability of the data.

Significance of the Study

This study seeks to contribute to the relatively small body of literature focusing on Hmong American students. Given that Hmong American students comprise a significant percentage of the overall school population in several urban districts in California and across the United States, and given the pattern of underachievement as described in the case of the Northern Central California school district studied and the few studies available, it is critical that more research be dedicated to explore both the factors associated with low academic performance and those associated with school success among Hmong American students.
Although Hmong American students have made some progress in school academically, they still constitute one of the groups that continue to struggle with academic success. One study has been conducted on the Hmong heritage language program at the secondary level and its impact on the Hmong student academic achievement; however, it is a more preliminary study, conducted at the master’s level. In addition, its methodology was limited to a combination of quantitative analysis of student records and qualitative data collected from a survey of Hmong high school seniors (Cha, 2010). To the knowledge of the researcher of this study, no study has focused not only on the academic achievement at the high school level, but also the success at the college level and then the success in the students’ lives and in the community. This study will hopefully provide a richer and more nuanced evaluation of the impact of participation in the Hmong world language class on the academic and developmental outcomes for Hmong American high school students. It will also introduce the voice of the students themselves, as they tell their stories and reflect upon their own experiences.

Conclusion

Low academic performance of Hmong American students, especially, high school students, has continued to be one of the important and urgent issues that schools and the community need to address. According to Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (2008), Hmong American students produce some of the lowest academic scores of any group of public school students. Walker (1989) suggests that Hmong American
student’s home culture characteristic influence the skill development, behavior and learning styles of Hmong students and can provide a resource to more effectively teach them. Indeed, the Hmong as World Language courses offering at BB High School draw upon Hmong cultural skills and represent one of the best efforts to address the needs of these students in high school. This study explores the various impacts of participation in Hmong as World Language Classes on Hmong American high school students, the Hmong community, and the school.

Chapter 2 explores several areas of educational research and theory, which provide insights into the challenges facing Hmong American students, their families and communities, and the schools which educate them. Theoretical lenses for exploring the situation of Hmong American students are identified. The review of the literature then introduces readers of this research to a short cultural and political history of the Hmong people and their forced migration to the United States at the end of the war in Vietnam. The research considers how these combinations of cultural characteristics, origins and migrations have led to the particular situation of Hmong American high school students seeking to situate themselves in the United States and its educational systems. At the same time, the research explores some of the strategies for education of racial and ethnic minorities and English learners, which are relevant to school-based efforts to meet the needs of Hmong American students.

Chapter 3 explains the combination of methodologies employed in this study, including both qualitative and quantitative analyses. It distinguishes what issues have
been addressed by each method. It also describes the procedures and tools that the researcher has employed to unlock the thickly described meanings conveyed by the dialogue among recent high school graduates who participated in the HWL program.

Chapter 4 presents and analyzes the data upon which the study is based – both the measured outcomes maintained by the school district and the life experiences and deep insights of two groups of participants in the HWL program – two teachers and a focus group of former students. The student data was developed through an intensive focus group among eight former high school students who took two years of Hmong as World Language. Their accounts to each other and to the researcher of their experiences and impressions are analyzed through thick description to tease out the implications for their high school careers and their longer term life preparation of sharing in the experience of these Hmong-centric learning experiences. The researcher then uses findings from these analyses of the different strands of data to address the research questions.

Chapter 5 provides an interpretation of findings, implications of the study for schools serving Hmong American students and for the Hmong community in the United States from which these students come and to which, hopefully, they return with skills, pride and a willingness to serve. The study concludes with recommendations for future action, recommendation for future study, and the reflections of the researcher.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter synthesizes existing research that provides understanding and directions for improving the academic achievement of Hmong American students. The analysis of the research literature is first grounded in the theoretical frames upon which this research is built. The chapter then explores three major themes that underlie the experiences of Hmong American students in their home communities, in the public schools, and the existing knowledge regarding resources to support Hmong American students in their school-based development. A final theme seeks to draw from these experiences and the research that has examined them, a window into the strategies that can build effective, culturally and linguistically grounded programs to improve the educational outcomes of Hmong American students.

The first topic after the review of theoretical frames focuses on the Hmong people. It is a discussion on the Hmong history, culture, and, language and educational background. The second focus within the review of research literature is on the barriers of academic success for Hmong American students in the public educational system. Its subtopics include a review of the struggles of Hmong American students due to low socioeconomic status, lack of academic integration skills, academic language deficiency, and the challenges of Hmong parents and their children, which often leads to a lack of support in education. The third focus of the research literature review explores the
personal, community and cultural sources of strength, which research has demonstrated can support Hmong American students as they pursue their school-based education. A fourth focus of the research literature review presents findings on effective strategies for raising the academic achievement of Hmong American students. It particularly examines the importance of preserving cultural identity, maintaining primary/heritage language, developing academic English, and utilizing best practices and effective teaching strategies to promote high academic achievement for Hmong American students.

Although Hmong American students face a formidable challenge in the educational system, it is the intent and effort of this literature review to convey useful research information on the positive impacts that the high school “Hmong as World Language” courses have on the academic achievement of Hmong American students. Equally important, this study will become a part of an extensive body of research studies that strive to improve learning and achievement for all language minority students. Finally, the research addressed in these topics and the analytical lenses provided by the theoretical frames are brought together to provide a research-supported understanding of the powerful role that formal instruction in their home language can play in supporting Hmong American students’ adaptation to the academic culture of the schools (and universities) while helping them to strengthen their grounding in their Hmong identity.
Theme One: Theoretical Frames

The following theories provide the theoretical/conceptual foundation and framework underpinning this study: critical race theory, theory of incompatibilities, and cultural capital and community cultural wealth theory. This study seeks to explore and understand the significance of Hmong identity of Hmong American adolescents; the role of Hmong language learning in cultural identity development and academic identity development, the impact of incorporation of Hmong home language learning on the overall educational and life outcomes of Hmong Americans.

Critical Race Theory

According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), Critical Race Theory (CRT) originated in American law schools and evolved in the early 1970s as a form of opposition scholarship concerned with racism facing people of color within educational institutions. It is a movement in American legal scholarship that studies race, racism and power. The CRT movement has made an impact on other schools of thought such as ethnic studies, political science and education as well (Delgado & Stegancic, 2001). CRT points out that in education and in the society in the United States, racism is widespread and it has been firmly established in society’s and schooling’s consciousness. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) state that despite the salience of race in U.S. society, as a topic of inquiry, it remains untheorized. However, they contend that race is still an important aspect in determining inequity in the United States. As a result, they attempt to theorize race and use race as a diagnostic tool for understanding school inequity.
One of the three propositions that Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) proposed was that “the intersection of race and property creates an analytic tool through which we can understand social (and, consequently, school) inequity” (p. 48). Based upon other research (Harris, 1993), Ladson-Billings and Tate argue that “whiteness” is privilege, and the possession of such privilege lays the foundation for the idea that “whiteness—that which Whites alone possess—is valuable and is property” (p. 58). To define the concept of “property functions of whiteness,” they include four points: (1) rights of disposition; (2) rights to use and enjoyments; (3) reputation and status property; and (4) the absolute right to exclude.

The rights of disposition include aspects where students are rewarded only for conformity to the “white norms” or where students are alienated for cultural practices. In connection to the experiences of Hmong American students, many have suffered mistreatment by their teachers due to such disposition. In the Hmong culture, when a child is sick, one of the first things that the parents will do is to look for a shaman “ua neeb saib” (to conduct a spiritual investigation) and/or “ua neeb kho” (to conduct a spiritual healing). The purpose of this spiritual healing is embedded in their strong belief that the soul is directly connected to the well-being of the individual. When a person falls ill, it is believed that the soul has left the body and once a shaman is summoned to bring it back to the body, a blessed string may be tied around the person’s neck or wrist to keep evil spirits away. The author’s 15 years of experience in the public school system has allowed him to witness several incidents where Hmong American high school
students were excluded from participating in physical education (PE) activities due to their neck string or wrist string. Some PE teachers deemed the strings inappropriate and went as far as cutting them off without the consent of the child or their parents. Most detrimental was when students were given low grades due to the teacher’s decision to exclude the student from participating in PE activities because of his/her own disposition of the student’s cultural practices. The teachers in these instances maintained a unilateral right of disposition over the student’s efforts to adhere to important Hmong cultural dictates. They recognized no need on their part to either understand or accommodate the student.

*The rights to use and enjoy* simply states that whites can enjoy the privilege of whiteness. Such privilege includes specific social, cultural, and economic advantages. In the school setting, whiteness can access a vast amount of resources and extensive use of school property. Kozol’s (1991) provides examples and interpretation of two New York City schools, one serving 825 white students in a newer and less crowded space, while the other school serves 1,550 black students in an overcrowded and older facility. Clearly, the students in the largely white school enjoyed the right (privilege) to use and enjoy many more educationally supportive resources than did the students in the primarily black school.

The analysis of Ladson-Billings and Tate can clearly provide a lens for exploring the situation of minorities other than African Americans and Latinos in American public schools. While the research that directly examines the experience of Hmong American
students is somewhat limited, the study by Ngo and Lee (2007) clearly suggests similar intersections with critical racial identity for these students as well. In addition, the author has worked in a school district in Northern California with a large population of Hmong American students. Within the author’s fifteen years as an educator and administrator, he has witnessed the development and establishment of several small and innovative high schools within the district. Unfortunately, for many of the Hmong American High school students, none of the new high schools were built in or near their immediate community. The schools were built in more affluent and/or white communities. Therefore, those Hmong students who wanted to attend typically could not attend due to transportation issues or because the school was out of their “home school” boundary.

Besides this, the district also invested millions of dollars in new and advanced technology and equipment for the schools. The schools also attracted more highly qualified teachers and the mobility of teachers transferring in and out was not as apparent as in other low-income public schools. As described by Ladson-Billings and Tate in regard to the two New York City schools, these new, innovative schools primarily benefitted dominant society students who were already advantaged in regard to their relationship with the culture of the schools. The majority of Hmong American high school students continue to attend traditional and rundown neighborhood schools. As Ladson-Billings and Tate note in regard to the two New York schools, the barriers to participate in the newer, innovative schools were considerable for students such as Hmong American students.
The concept of reputation and status property promotes the idea that to damage one’s reputation in some ways is to damage his/her personal property. This concept is often established in legal cases of libel and slander. For instance, when a school or program is considered nonwhite, it will have a lower status or reputation. In the case when urban students or poor black students are bused to suburban schools, these “suburban” schools risk losing their reputation. In addition, despite the privilege of learning and knowing a foreign language, bilingual educational programs in the United States are seen as nonwhite; thus, bilingual education is often not very favorable to the majority (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Many Hmong American high school students come to school with high levels of proficiency and literacy in the Hmong language, but many schools and school districts do not consider the Hmong language as an important world language. As a result, Hmong American students have to take other World Language courses in order to meet the high school graduation requirements. Although the Hmong language may be perceived as low status, its use and, in particular, its acceptance within the school setting, have been found to have some positive impact in Hmong American high school students’ educational and personal lives. For instance, in one of the school districts in northern California, Hmong as World Language courses and Hmong as World Language challenge tests have begun to be offered to Hmong American high school students. In this researcher’s own experiences of teaching Hmong language courses at the high school level, the presence of these courses and students’ participation in them coincided with a noticeable reduction in
the amount of gang activities and fights on the school campus and within the community at large. This observable easing of the behavioral climate may have been associated with an increased sense of there now being a “safer environment” as the Hmong language courses came to represent a place for students to learn about themselves and to fully appreciate who they are.

This researcher strongly believes from his own experiences, that as a learner, one cannot learn about one’s language without learning one’s culture, identity, and cultural values. Castellano, Davis, and Lahache (2000), in discussing the importance of language revitalization in indigenous communities, also reiterate that “Language is our unique relationship to the Creator, our attitudes, beliefs, values, and fundamental notions of what is truth. Our languages are the cornerstones of who we are as a people; without our languages our cultures cannot survive” (p. 25). The researcher hypothesizes that the experience of Hmong American students in their Hmong language classes can produce supportive outcomes consistent with two of Maslow’s (1943) most fundamental needs within the Hierarchy of Needs: The safety needs and the love/belonging needs. Both levels of needs include positive contributors such as friendship, family, a feeling of belongingness and a sense of acceptance. Once these two levels are realized and satisfied, the researcher proposes that many Hmong students would be able to elevate themselves to the next level of the esteem needs where they can respect themselves and be respected by others. Clearly, high self-esteem has the potential to contribute to the
development of confidence and positive academic achievement for many Hmong American students at the high school level.

The absolute right to exclude is a concept within Critical Race Theory which contends that “Whiteness is constructed in this society as the absence of the ‘contaminating’ influence of blackness” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 60). For instance, by not allowing black students to access their education in a white school is a demonstration of the absolute right to exclude. In addition, the segregation of black and white students in the past is also a good example, which demonstrates this concept of exclusion. This concept is also illustrated in the restrictions of funding of private schooling, school of choice, and the promotion of vouchers. Other programs such as honors programs and/or gifted programs, which separate and track students in a given system are also reiterating the absolute to exclude. In connection with the Hmong American student experience, it should also be pointed out that the exclusion of certain languages from those languages whose study is deemed academically worthy is itself an exercise of the right to exclude.

According to Nieto (2004), tracking of students begins early in grade school where the decisions of grouping students are often made on weak justifications. Tracking, as affirmed by Nieto, “is frequently linked with racial, ethnic, and social-class difference” (p. 93). As a minority in the United States, Hmong American students are among those students who are often tracked into various programs within the school system. For instance, according to the report Closing the Academic Achievement Gap of
Hmong, Mien, and Lao Students by Vang and Hmong, Mien, and Lao Advisory Committee (2004), a significant number of Hmong American students remained in the English Language Learner program for their entire K-12 education. For many Hmong American high school students, this meant exclusion from many programs that could have benefited them. For instance, English language learners are considered non-proficient in English; hence, this often excludes them from taking more challenging classes such as honors or advanced classes, which would prepare them for college and beyond. To remain forever designated an “English language learner” is to experience the absolute exclusion from many academically beneficial opportunities.

One recurring critique of Critical Race Theory is that too often it is expressed in terms of a Black/White binary, which fails to account for the many faces of privilege and the communities of color and gender whose members experience institutionalized injustice because of who they are. Yosso (2005) cites various researchers to show that “critical race theorists began to pull away from critical legal studies (CLS) because the critical legal framework restricted their ability to analyze racial injustice” (p. 72). According to Yosso, other groups such as women and people of color have expressed concerns that oppression in the law and society cannot be limited to only Black and White if society wants to fully understand these issues. They feel that their gender, class, sexual, immigrant and language experiences and histories have also been silenced and thus they challenge this tendency toward a Black/White binary (Yosso, 2005).
According to Espinoza and Harris (1998) the horrendous history of racism and experience of African Americans in the United States cannot go unnoticed. Yet, at the same time other people of color also have their own histories that likewise have been shaped by racism and should not be ignored. Yosso (2005) contends that “by offering a two-dimensional discourse, the Black/White binary limits understandings of the multiple ways in which African Americans, Native Americans, Asian/Pacific Islanders, Chicanas/os, and Latinas/os continue to experience, respond to, and resist racism and other forms of oppression” (p. 72). Examples from the Hmong American experience which this writer has incorporated into the analysis of CRT provide evidence of the legitimacy of this critique.

The work of Daniel Solorzano (1997, 1998) has identified five tenets of CRT that can and should inform theory, research, pedagogy, curriculum and policy in the field of education: (1) the intercentricity of race and racism; (2) the challenge to dominant ideology; (3) the commitment to social justice; (4) the centrality of experiential knowledge; and (5) the utilization of interdisciplinary approaches. Yosso points out that the collective of these five themes represent a challenge to the existing modes of scholarship. However, Yosso (2005) defines CRT in education as a “theoretical and analytical framework that challenges the ways race and racism impact educational structures, practices, and discourses” (p. 74).

*Critical Race Theory as a lens for looking at multicultural education.* According to Banks (2006), multicultural education grew out of a civil rights movement grounded in
such democratic ideals of the West as freedom, justice, and equality. The multicultural education movement is designed to restructure educational institutions so that all students, including middle-class White males, will acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively in a culturally and ethnically diverse nation and world. Banks (2006) noted:

Although multicultural education is not opposed to the West, its advocates do demand that the truth about the west be told, that its debt to people of color and women be recognized and included in the curriculum, and that the discrepancies between the ideals of freedom and equality and realities of racism and sexism be taught to students. Reflective action by citizens is also an integral part of multicultural theory. Multicultural education is also postmodern in its assumptions about knowledge and knowledge construction; it challenges positivist assumptions about the relationships between human values, knowledge, and action. (p. 130)

Bennett (2010) points out that multicultural education is an approach of the teaching and learning process that asserts cultural pluralism within a culturally diverse society where ethnic minority groups are free to retain many of their cultural ways, and the society as a whole reflects the many cultural strands of its diverse member groups. This approach includes four components: moving toward equity, reforming curriculum, becoming inter-culturally competent, and combating discrimination and prejudice. The components encourage and foster students to achieve at their highest potential intellectually, socially, and personally. They also foster good race relations in students, parents, teachers, and school administrators. Furthermore, multicultural education is a positive approach and can ensure the highest levels of academic achievement for all students (Nieto, 2007).
Banks (1994) also expressed the idea that individuals are strongly influenced by the common national culture during their early socialization within a society. Therefore, social institutions such as schools, mass media, the courts, and even ethnic groups other than their own, have strong influence on every member of that particular society. Thus, it is believed that even though each ethnic group has some unique cultural characteristics, collectively they also share some very similar cultural traits, particularly over time.

Banks (1994) affirmed:

Multiculturalism envisions an open society, in which individuals from diverse ethnic, cultural, and social class groups have equal opportunities to function and participate. In an open society, individuals can take full advantage of the opportunities and rewards, within all social, economic, and political institutions without regard to their own ancestry or ethnic identity. They can also participate fully in the society while preserving their distinct ethnic and cultural traits. (p. 130)

Today, teachers in most urban city school districts provide educational services for students from a variety of socioeconomic status and cultural and language groups. Carrasquillo and Rodríguez (2002) argue that educators must organize classrooms that promote multicultural environment and curriculum by making an effort to learn and understand language minority students’ language styles and cultures. The drive for better learning opportunities for language minority students needs to include their values, culture and history, language, and life experiences. In addition, it is significant for the school or classroom “to demonstrate genuine respect and concern for all students, regardless of their racial, cultural, or linguistic background” (Carrasquillo & Rodríguez, 2002, p. 53). Although different ethnic groups are influenced by events differently, it is
essential to understand that multicultural education presents to students new ways of
learning and looking at the history and culture that they live in (Banks, 1994). As will be
discussed later in this chapter, a multicultural educational setting is also an important
resource for helping minority students experience the school setting as a safe and
supportive environment within which they may pursue such higher developmental needs
as expertise and self-actualization (Maslow, 1970).

In the current research, the researcher has employed the lens of critical race theory
to deconstruct the discourse of multicultural education and, in particular, to explore the
experiences of Hmong American students in an American high school setting, as those
experiences have been particularly defined by the students’ Hmong American identity.
This identity as experienced by the students themselves may prove to be considerably
different from the perceived image of the Hmong American student held by cultural
gatekeepers who engage with these students in the high school setting. Indeed,
assumptions about “multiculturalism,” when applied to Hmong American students
without genuine understanding may, far from supporting the educational aspirations of
these students, which can serve to undermine their educational progress as educators act
upon inaccurate and misplaced stereotypes. The particular critical race lens which must
be applied to the experience of Hmong American immigrant high school students will
become more apparent in the analytical chapters of this study. For the purposes of this
discussion, it is sufficient to note that a critical race analysis of the Hmong American
experience of multicultural education is a lens through which the many forms of data and strands of narrative in this study will be viewed.

**Theory of Incompatibilities**

According to Cardenas and Cardenas (1977), the Theory of Incompatibilities states that the failures of cultural and language minority students can be attributed to a lack of compatibility between the characteristics of minority children and the characteristics of a typical instructional program. Cardenas and Cardenas (1977) also contend that bilingual education is one of the best solutions to eliminate incompatibility in education because typical bilingual programs consist of three basic elements such as: 1) the continued cognitive development of the child, with accompanying development of basic skills and content acquisition in his dominant language; 2) the development of English as a second language; and 3) the further extension of his native language system. A more culturally nuanced understanding of Bourdieu’s theory of Social and Cultural capital is consistent with what Cardenas and Cardenas argue above.

Bourdieu (1986) expressed that students come to school with different cultural experiences. As a result, these home experiences facilitate the interactions students have with schools and influence their academic performance. Inevitably, however, not all students come into the school already grounded in the cultural capital that the school often assumes as a given in their students’ development. Therefore, not all students equally understand how to interact effectively with the school culture as expressed in the curriculum and student-teacher interactions. For this reason, Cardenas and Cardenas
(1977) contend, “An instructional program developed for a white, Anglo Saxon, English-speaking middle class school population cannot be and is not adequate for a non-white, non-Anglo Saxon, non-English-speaking, or non-middle class population” (p. 7). They assert that in order for minority students to perform at their highest level, the instructional program and the characteristics of the learner have to be compatible. In order to do this, it is necessary to first identify the incompatibilities before they can be eliminated. Cardenas and Cardenas (1977) have identified over 40 such incompatibilities and have grouped them into five areas: poverty, culture, language, mobility, and societal perceptions.

The following review of literature will be limited to only three of the five areas that Cardenas and Cardenas (1977) proposed: poverty, culture, and language. Cardenas and Cardenas (1977) concluded, “the growth of a child in a poverty situation leads to a non-typical developmental pattern, which differs from developmental patterns of middle class children” (p. 7). Poverty, poor health, and lower education, ultimately affect our society as a whole. Research on socioeconomic status pertaining to educational issues indicate that children from low-socioeconomic status families develop academic skills more slowly compared to children from higher socioeconomic status groups (Morgan, Farkas, Hillemeier, & Maczuga, 2009). Furthermore, Cardenas and Cardenas (1977) argue that the absence of successful role models in the child’s home community and an unfamiliarity with the academic oriented tradition of the schools and the absence of adequate books, magazines, newspaper, televisions, learning games, or other stimulating
toys have contributed to the development of an atypical developmental pattern, or, at least, atypical in terms of the school site expectations for entering students’ cultural preparation. According to Aikens and Barbarin (2008), the literacy environment, the number of books owned, and parental attitudes can impact children’s initial reading competence. In addition, Orr (2003) affirmed that parents from low-socioeconomic communities are often unable to afford resources such as books, computers, or tutors to create this positive literacy environment for their own children.

Cardenas and Cardenas (1977) proposed three generalizations regarding the compatibilities between minority children and most school systems:

1. Most school personnel know nothing about the cultural characteristics of the minority school population;
2. The few school personnel who are aware of these cultural characteristics seldom do anything about it; and
3. On those rare occasions when the school does attempt to do something concerning the culture of the minority groups, it always does the wrong things. (p. 10)

They further express that typical instructional materials are developed by and for white, Anglo, middle class personnel present surroundings, situations, dialogue, and conclusions, which are often foreign and incongruous to the culturally atypical child. The absence of minority traditions, values and orientations in instructional materials makes them irrelevant, meaningless, and inferior in educational value for utilization by minority children (Cardenas & Cardenas, 1977). To create effective classroom interventions to respond to the needs of language minority students, various researchers have offered the following pedagogies: strategies that include multilingual education
(Banks, 1979; Banks & McGee, 2001; Gay, 2000; Grant & Sleeter, 2003; Nieto, 1996), culturally responsive pedagogy (Cazden & Leggett, 1981; Gibson, 1976) and culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995). These different strategies strive for the inclusion of minority students’ ways of learning and thinking; promote curriculum materials that reflect minority students’ understanding and experiences; encourage family and community engagement; and support essential aspects of the minority status in the society at large (Au, 1980; Banks, 1993; Banks, 1981; Dhand, 1988; Moll & Diaz, 1987; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Incompatibilities as a Lens for Introducing Bilingual Education as Necessary in Mediating the Incompatibilities between Hmong Orality and English Written-literacy

As in the case of Critical Race Theory discussed above, the theory of incompatibilities provides an analytical lens for exploring the functions which Hmong language education may perform in supporting students’ synthesis of the cognitive styles resident within Hmong orality and English literacy. The Hmong language arises from Hmong culture and society. This statement may seem a naïve truism. However, it is important to realize that since Hmong language has arisen as an oral language in a society that is built upon the cultural building blocks that oral societies employ to share and act upon meaning (Ong, 1982), the language carries with it and expresses a wide variety of cultural supports and clues to understanding the world, which are internal to the Hmong social identity. It is this identity which the Hmong students, especially the newly-arrived students, bring with them into the school experience. In the school, they are immersed in a literate culture, one whose structures and social organizations, whose clues to meaning
arise from the same source as English language literacy itself (Olsen & Torrance, 1991). Thus, an “incompatibility” is the nearly inevitable consequence of situating the students from an orally-constructed culture in the school system of a literately-constructed culture in another country, where the language is not only structurally different (literate) but unfamiliar. This current research is based in part on the proposition that the integration of a Hmong language experience into the education of the primarily English language structured education of the Hmong students in the United States may at least somewhat mediate the incompatibilities between ways of learning and ways of knowing. In exploring the use or orality and literacy in Native American expression, Dickenson (1994) noted:

By re-situating orality and literacy within social space in this manner, that is, by moving from the phonetic and lexical levels of language to the larger meaning systems of semantics and discourse analysis, we are able to position the two terms not in absolute opposition, but rather in differential relation. Both orality and literacy become embodied by/in specific processes of speaking, writing and representing that encompass not only the individual text or utterance but also their place within a given discursive formation, including the persons involved in, acting upon, and/or affected by the sound-, word-, or meaning-units. Orality in literacy rather than orality and/or literacy (and, concomitantly, literacy in orality rather than literacy and/or orality. (p. 321)

It is the interconnection of orality in literacy and literacy in orality within the Hmong world language class within the English language education of the public school which this study is examining.

Jim Cummins’ common underlying proficiency (CUP) model confirms that there is an interdependent relationship between primary language proficiency and second
language acquisition (Cummins, 2001). Specifically, the CUP model explains that skills, ideas, and concepts that students learn in their first language are transferable to the second language. It has been shown through research that there are no adverse effects on the development of students’ literacy skills in a bilingual program. Cardenas and Cardenas (1977) also argued, “a child cannot be taught successfully in a language system which he does not understand” (p. 12). This is even more the case when the languages arise from significantly different cultural traditions and different relationships with orality and literacy. Thus, under appropriate conditions and student motivation, the process of transferring academic skills and knowledge occurs naturally across languages (Cummins, 2001). Thus, a strong primary language literacy background accounts for genuinely bilingual/biliterate students’ academic success.

Krashen (1997) affirmed that the knowledge a language minority student attains in his/her primary language supports the acquisition and comprehension of English. Krashen also demonstrated that the presence of the primary language does not interfere with the acquisition and use of the second language. Indeed, in the case of Hmong students seeking to acquire academic mastery and fluency in the English language, this study proposes that access to Hmong language and its culturally-grounded ways of knowing provides a resource through which academic knowledge can be acquired by students while negotiating the distance between the two cultural ways of learning. As will be discussed in this chapter, the high school formal study of the Hmong language is not an alternative to the need for Hmong bilingual instruction in the early years.
However, as students prepare for their post-high school education and careers, the formal study of the Hmong language provides a base for building skills in the application of academic language for expository and narrative writing in all relevant languages allowing students to draw upon multiple ways of knowing.

Drawing upon Lev Vygotsky’s (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the more formal and analytical study of the Hmong language at the high school level helps the Hmong American academic neophyte, who can develop a higher level of expertise in formal expository writing that is applicable to the writing of academic English. In addition, the Hmong language carries with it patterns of knowing and understanding that are embedded in its oral roots and which provide additional cognitive tools for the students to employ in mastering academic content. According to Vygotsky (1978), the zone of proximal development (ZPD) refers to tasks that arise in a region between the space where a student can complete the task fully independently and that space where the child has to depend upon the guidance and assistance of a teacher or an adult in order to complete it. Berk and Winsler (1995) also point out that Vygotsky and other like-minded educational professionals believed that the role of education was to give children experience that began within their zones of proximal development, thereby encouraging and advancing their individual learning. Thus, the academic study of Hmong (the familiar home language) supports the student’s development of ease in the use of academic language and facility in multiple styles of academic understanding in other settings, including those relying upon English.
Cultural Capital and Community Cultural Wealth Theory

Cultural capital theory provides another important lens in understanding the experiences of Hmong American students in American public schools. Bourdieu (1986) characterizes cultural capital as convertible forms of knowledge, skills, education and advantages that a person has accumulated, which can improve their condition and/or status in society. Parents play an important role in cultural capital. Over time, parents can pass on the approach and knowledge their children will need to have in order to succeed in the current educational system. Bourdieu (1986) argues that the cultural knowledge and practice in one’s home can facilitate the interactions students have with schools and influence their academic achievement. This process shows how cultural resources from the home transform into cultural capital and then are used for social advantage for individuals. Society perceives and values cultural resources such as knowledge, practices, and artifacts differentially. As a result, the differences in cultural experience, translated into capital that can lead to an advantage or disadvantage in various settings. The educational opportunities and/or expectations of schools are not neutral and are not equitably distributed (Bourdieu, 1986).

Bourdieu (1974) argued that the concept of cultural capital is important because it helps explain why social class influences school success. Culture and social capital reproduce cultural practices, social connections and knowledge that are used to gain social and monetary benefit. According to Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital exists in three forms. First, embodied cultural capital refers to styles, manners, cultural
preferences and affinities, and valued types of cultural knowledge. Second, cultural capital is objectified in artifacts and goods we generally think of as cultural, such as literature, music, dance forms, art, historical sites, museums, and the like. School syllabi and texts are also cultural artifacts of this type (Olneck, 2000). Finally, institutionalized cultural capital refers to academic credentials and educational qualifications—those institutionalized things that signify one’s cultural distinction.

While Bourdieu’s analysis provides a valuable lens for exploring the ways in which socio-cultural privilege is replicated through the supposedly democratic institution of public schooling, by itself it is static. If the privileged majority do not agree to change their cultural expectations for students entering school, the imbalance of cultural capital remains and even increases. Yosso (2005) offers an alternative model of the sources and uses of cultural capital, which seeks to correct this imbalance.

One of the most prevalent forms of contemporary racism in US schools is deficit thinking when looking through a CRT lens (Yosso, 2005). Deficit thinking leads to viewing poor academic performance as the fault of the minority students and families because: (a) students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills; and (b) parents neither value nor support their child’s education. According to Yosso (2005), racialized assumptions about minority students and families often lead schools to default to the banking method of education and as a consequence, minority students usually receive educational knowledge that deemed valuable by dominant society.
As cited in Yosso (2005), several researchers (Auerbach, 2001; Delgado Bernal, 1997, 2001; Orellana Faulstich, 2003; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Stanton-Salazar, 2001) contended, employing a CRT lens, “Educators can ‘see’ that Communities of Color nurture cultural wealth through at least six forms of capital such as aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital” (p. 77). First, aspirational capital means being able to maintain high “hopes and dreams for the future” for oneself and the family even in the face of adversity. Second, linguistic capital refers to one’s ability to speak and communicate in multiple languages in various contexts. Yosso (2005) reiterated, “linguistic capital reflects the idea that Students of Color arrive at school with multiple language and communication skills” (p. 78). Third, familial capital is the “cultural knowledge” of an individual. Such knowledge is the direct result of one’s connection to his/her immediate or extended family, which promotes a sense of belonging and togetherness or sense of support. Fourth, social capital refers to one’s ability to navigate through networks of people and/or the community for resources and support. For instance, a student accessing scholarships through various community organizations is utilizing his/her social capital. Fifth, navigational capital is the ability of an individual to navigate or maneuver through institutions that may be challenging or stressful. A person can thrive in a stressful circumstance or event through the use of his/her external resource of family or community and inner resource such as resiliency. Finally, resistant capital is the ability of an individual to resist inequality and racism by maintaining and nurturing one’s own cultural wealth. When parents teach their children
to exhibit a certain attitude or behavior that challenges the status quo, it is a form of resistant capital.

Research on the Hmong American community and students grounded in that community identifies various sources of community cultural wealth that provide a resource of strength and resilience for Hmong American students whose ties to their family and community are strong. Ngo and Lee (2007) report that the structure of pressures that are created by the family has been one of the main factors that contributes to the successes of Vietnamese, ethnic Chinese from Vietnam and Hmong students. For example, this structure includes the constant parental push, close supervision, and control of their children. In addition to making positive impacts on the academic performance of Hmong American students, Ngo and Lee (2007) also contend that the structure of pressures also helps to shape student’s behavior as well, especially those children that behave differently from a customary, traditional, or generally accepted standard in the community.

Hmong parents are not only controlling, pushing, or supervising their children, but they also teach and motivate their children to overcome challenges and to continue to make improvements in their lives, both at home and school. The following are two popular proverbs that elders and parents like to teach to middle and high school students about the importance of helping each other to learn and work hard in order to have a good life.
“Sib qhia thiaj txawj ntse;  
sib pab thiaj tsis ciaj luag qhev”  
(Teaching each other so you will be smarter;  
helping each other so you will not become a slave)

This is a good proverb to teach youngsters because most Hmong parents have gone through many of hardships (including pain, suffering, and oppression) in their lifetime, and they do not want to see their children suffer like them. This has been a popular proverb to teach children about being a humble person and trying their very best to learn everyday:

“Tus nquag paub tsis txhua,  
tus nkees qhia los tsis ua”  
(A hard working person [learner] does not know everything,  
but a lazy person will not do anything no matter what and how hard you teach). ”

The lessons above have benefited many Hmong children for many generations, and it will continue to benefit students. Proficiency in the Hmong language and culture will enable Hmong American students to draw from these resources, which will enhance their personal character, work ethic, academic studies, and career.

Theme Two: The Hmong People – History, Culture, Language, Educational Background

After the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, the Hmong were targeted and chastised by the Communist Regime for supporting the United States of America and for the actions they had taken against Communism during the war (Faderman, 1998; Vang, 2008). Shortly after the war and facing persecutions, thousands of Hmong sought political asylum in the refugee camps in Thailand. After their arrival in the United States
in 1975 and later, adapting and adjusting to an educated, industrial, technological and diverse society proved far more difficult to the Hmong than they could ever imagine. Their material culture, means of livelihood, social organization, spiritual practices, and pattern of political leaderships had to change and be compromised almost immediately in order to survive and make progress (Chan, 1994). The vast majority of Hmong families continue to face many hardships due to lack of school-based education, language barriers, health problems, and poverty.

_Hmong History_

The Hmong have a long history dated as far back as 4000 B.C. in China (Mueller, 2001). In China, Hmong also endured long struggles due to political pressure to assimilate into the Chinese culture (Yang, 2009). After decades of fighting and defending their lands and independence, the Hmong eventually migrated to other countries. Their journey in search of freedom and peace led them to the country of Laos in the early 1800s (Vang, 2008; Yang, 1993).

In Laos, Hmong resided in the highlands of the northern plateaus. They began farming and settling in small villages as a “homogeneous” ethnic group (Yang, 1993). As indicated by Quincy (1988), the Hmong were preoccupied with living their lives, carrying on with their traditions and practicing their religion. They were able to live in peace and prosperity for generations.

During the Vietnam War, the Hmong were recruited by the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to fight against the spread of communism in Southeast Asia in
a war known as the Secret War in Laos. In return, the Hmong were promised freedom and protection (Vang, 2008). The decision to fight alongside the Americans caused many deaths among Hmong men, women, and children. Villages were ruined and many people were devastated by the loss of loved ones. Eventually, a war of men became a war of children. As the Hmong men lost their lives, young boys around the age of twelve and thirteen years old were also recruited to fight in the war (Hamilton-Merritt, 1993).

After the United States withdrew its troops from Southeast Asia, Hmong families were left to fend for themselves. They were targeted as enemies because they were allied with the United States. After Laos fell to communism in 1975, thousands of Hmong families fled Laos in fear of persecution. They escaped through the jungles of Laos and crossed the Mekong River to the neighboring country of Thailand (Quincy, 1988). Thousands of Hmong died during this exodus because they were ambushed and killed by the communist regime. Many men, women, and children also died from drowning in the Mekong River, starvation, or sickness.

In the refugee camps, the Hmong had to depend on the international humanitarian agencies and Thai government for resources. The Hmong lived in poverty and had no access to the mountains for farming or to the city for jobs. They had to endure harsh living conditions and were sometimes persecuted for leaving the refugee camps (Murai, 2010; Quincy, 1988). As a people who prefer independence over depending on others for food and shelter, the Hmong found life in the refugee camps extremely difficult. It was
their desire to live freely as a people that brought many Hmong families to the western countries in 1975 (Vang, 2008).

Eventually, the Hmong resettled in other countries such as the United States, Canada, France, and Australia. The majority of Hmong families fled to the United States along with their leader, General Vang Pao. By the early 1980s, approximately 50,000 Hmong resettled in the United States (Chan, 1994). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), there are at least 260,076 Hmong Americans living in the U.S., with 91,224 living in California, 66,181 living in Minnesota, and 49,240 living in Wisconsin, the top three states with the largest Hmong American population.

Living in America has been challenging for Hmong families (Yang, 2003). They had lived simple lives for generations as farmers in an agricultural society. Surviving in an industrial, high tech society was an overwhelming experience with many unforeseen obstacles. Although Hmong have always identified themselves as an independent people, the drastic changes from their traditional way of life made it difficult (Chan, 1994). Despite all the hardships, the Hmong have come to call America their home as their youths continue to contribute to this great nation in various professions.

**Hmong Culture**

Hmong have tremendous respect for spirituality, family life, and tradition. Family is very important in the Hmong culture. Without a family, one is considered “ua neeg twm zeej los yog ua neeg loj leeb” (*a loner*) without responsibilities, values, or concerns for life (Vang, 1998). In addition, the extended family is also an essential part of the
Hmong culture. Survival depends largely on sharing and caring for one another through this type of family structure (Cha, 2010). Clan elders keep the members of the family together ensuring that everyone maintains strong emotional ties to each other. The nuclear and extended family members function as a unit of production in the Hmong culture (Chan, 1994). Major traditions such as funeral and wedding rituals, and New Year celebrations are shared and produced by the members of a clan through support and contributions. The Hmong culture, the immediate family members, the clan, and/or extended family all play a very important role in up-bringing children in the community (Cha, 2010). Specifically, in education, the whole community wants students to do well in school so that they can come back to provide meaningful services in the community. This expectation is expected for all students and has pressured them to do well and try their personal best in school (Lee & Ngo, 2007).

Animism is a belief in spirits that reside in nature and sometimes interact with people (Dunnigan, 1986). The Hmong’s aspect of spirituality dwells in the realm of animism and shamanism. The Hmong believe that a person has many souls. When a person is sick, the soul has left the physical body. A shaman, one who has the ability to enter the spirit world, is often called upon to help and find out what has happened to the person’s soul in the spirit world (Va, 2007; Vang, 1998). In the Hmong culture, a shaman is not only a spiritual healer, but also a clan leader, decision maker, herbal medicine doctor, and a problem solver (Vang 1998). Since Hmong are very spiritual people, they often seek for a shaman’s help before embarking on other alternative type of
health care. Shamanism has been practice for thousands of years in the Hmong culture and has continued until this day.

Traditionally, the Hmong people are ancestor worshippers. They believe that when a person dies, his/her soul lives on. Because elders are most respected by younger people, their spirits in the afterlife are believed to have a significant impact on the living. It is strongly believed that angry ancestors could possibly bring illness, death or misfortune to the descendants (Quincy, 1988). For this reason, during traditional events such as marriage, birth, and death, certain offerings and rituals are given and performed to the ancestors so that those who are still living may live in peace and prosperity.

Hmong Language and Educational Background

The Hmong language is monosyllabic, which means each word of the Hmong language is one syllable. Furthermore, the Hmong language is a tonal language. Each word is marked with a tone marker, giving the language a variation of low to high pitches and voice quality (Va, 2007; Vang, 1998). It is overall, a simple language in structure (Quincy, 1988). Although much research has been done on the origin of the Hmong language, it was in fairly recent time that a written form was established for the Hmong people to use. It was created by missionary linguists around the 1950s (Va, 2007). Using the Romanized Hmong script, it has been possible for the Hmong to preserve and share their history, culture, and language with others and the younger generations.

Education and hard work are two things Hmong parents value most (O’Reilly, 1998). However, since formal education has never been prominent in Hmong society,
much of the learning has always been through oral storytelling or verbal instructions by parents or family members. Tales and legends were told and passed on from generation to generation through word of mouth. Even today, many Hmong parents are more comfortable and familiar with oral storytelling and teaching. Vang (1998) studied three groups of Hmong parents who have stayed in the U.S for one to five years, six to ten years, and more than 10 years. He then, linked this to their children’s academic achievement. Forty-five Hmong parents, who each have a child attending a high school in the Sacramento area, were randomly selected to participate in the study. The parents’ cultural retention was examined and compared with their children’s grade point average. The study reveals that cultural retention among the three groups of Hmong parents differed significantly. A strong correlation ($r^2 = .81$) was found between the parents’ cultural retention and the length of residence. Hmong parents who have been in the U.S. for a longer period of time tend to decrease their practice of the Hmong culture. Two other variables such as parents’ educational background and the age of the parents do not seem to affect the degree of cultural retention. Retaining and practicing the Hmong culture by Hmong parents seem to have some positive impact on their children’s academic achievement. The study also indicates that there is a moderate correlation between cultural retention and students’ academic achievement.

Vang (1998) indicates in his study that whether one acquires knowledge formally or informally, the learning process has been one of the most significant concepts in Hmong society. Hmong children learned informally through participation and
cooperative group work with family members. Shade (1997) describes this cognitive learning style as one of the three characteristics of a field-sensitive or field-dependent learning. According to the two previous studies by Hvitfeldt (1986) and Worthley (1987) on the Hmong cognitive style cited by Shade (1997), the “results indicated behaviors characteristic of a field-dependent style, including consistent interpersonal interactions among the students, a reliance on external or contextual referents, and a personal relationship with the instructor” (p. 112). The learning experience of Hmong children in their families prepare them to be more successful in learning environments that employ field dependent strategies than those that rely on field independent strategies. Moua (2007) also shares that formal education has always been highly valued by the Hmong. However, back in Laos, it was far away from the villages and only those who could afford it had the luxury of being educated formally.

Since Hmong were more accustomed to informally educating their children, adjusting to the formal educational system in the United States has been a tremendous struggle both emotionally and psychologically. In many instances, the generation gap seems to be widened. For fear of losing their culture, Hmong parents sometimes pressure children to uphold and respect traditions with strict discipline (Cha, 2010). However, such pressure pushes many young Hmong Americans away from traditional lifestyles and into various negative aspects of American youth such as gangs, drugs, and dropping out of school (Cha, 2010; O’Reilly, 1998). Fortunately for the Hmong, social mobility and financial security are major reasons why they value and appreciate the
opportunities that formal education brings. As Moua (2007) simply put it, more and more Hmong individuals are pursuing higher education because they are realizing that it is the key toward being independent and self-sufficient.

Theme Three: Barriers to Academic Success for Hmong American Students

Problematically, the data of Asian American student achievement are frequently aggregated. Significantly, aggregate data mask the tremendous differences in achievement and attainment across Asian ethnic groups. The nuances of experience among Asian American students who have been in the United States for multiple generations and those who are more recent arrivals are lost in the aggregated data. (Ngo & Lee, 2007, p. 416)

Despite the ethnic revival movements to reform the educational system in the United States, the academic achievement gap of ethnic groups such as African Americans, Mexican Americans, and some Asian Americans continue to increase (Banks, 1994). Similarly, Hmong American students share this same reality. Although the Hmong culture may share some basic cultural values as other Asian Americans, their history, culture, language, and immigration and educational experiences are incredibly different (Vang, 2010). Understanding some of the critical and complex issues that directly impact Hmong American students’ capacity to learn and achieve at their highest level can potentially lead to some practical solutions.

Low Socio-economic Status

Yang (2003) and Lee (2005) stress that although some members of Hmong American community have achieved mainstream success; many others are still living in poverty. For instance, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2009), of all families in the
total population of the United States, 10.5% live below the poverty rate. In comparison, 26.9% of the Hmong families live below the poverty rate. A large proportion (30.3%) of the Hmong families with children under the age of 18 years is living in poverty. In addition, Lee’s (2005) ethnographic research study on Hmong American youth at University Heights High School (UHS) in Wisconsin, affirms that Hmong Americans youth struggle with issues related to poverty. Many of the Hmong American youth report that they live in low-income housing, work part-time to help support their families, and juggle family responsibilities along with their own studies (Lee, 2005).

Research also indicates that socio-economic status and the level of poverty among Hmong American students have a significant impact on their academic progress and achievement. One such study (Vang, 2001) explores the academic problems of Hmong American secondary students by examining and analyzing 480 academic profiles of successful and unsuccessful Hmong students who were either on-track or off-track to graduate from McLane High School, an urban high school in the Central Valley of California. According to the background variables of Hmong American students investigated in Vang’s study, on-track students had a higher proportion of parents employed than did the off-track students. The data, therefore, concludes that parent employment seems to correlate to the academic success of those Hmong American high school students who are doing well. Hmong American students are mostly from a disadvantaged home environment and are among the poorest students compared to other
immigrants in the American educational system due to limited English proficient, poverty, mobility, and limited capacity of their parents to support them (Vang, 2001).

*Lack of Academic Integration Skills*

Although individuals within a society may share a common pattern of learning, for Hmong American students, success in an American school requires quick adaptation in many areas of their lives due to their cultural, educational, and linguistic background (Vang, 2001). In Vang’s qualitative study, Hmong American high school dropouts articulated strongly that they, in fact, liked school, but as they moved up the grade levels, they began to fall behind academically. They also felt that they were unsuccessful because they were “under-prepared” whereas those who were successful appeared “well prepared.” Those who had fallen behind did not know what to do or where to start. As a whole, the lack of academic skills and knowledge contributed to their inability to make progress and thrive in school. As a result, many Hmong American students become overwhelmed and often disengage academically and socially in school (Kwon, 2006).

Hmong American students often come to school with various disadvantages that put them at risk. In school, they must acquire English to levels comparable to that of native speakers of English of the same age and grade level. Moreover, they must also meet the same challenging grade level standards and graduation requirements as native speakers.

According to the “model-minority” stereotype, all Asian students are smart and excel in school where they have few adjustment problems and need limited support from their teachers (Nieto, 2004). Unfortunately, this is not only inaccurate, but also leads
teachers to believe that all Asian American students, including Hmong American students, are all the same. Asian Americans are extremely diverse in the United States (Vang, 2010), and such a stereotypical view can have a negative impact on Hmong American students’ academic progress because their needs are obviously different. According to Mueller (2001), a long history of a nontraditional system of learning is prominent throughout the history of Hmong Americans. Like other immigrant students, learning a second language and adjusting to school are challenging experiences (Nieto, 2004). Furthermore, Hmong American students must learn to live in a country that is extremely pluralistic and modernized, quite different from where they have come from. Research studies have found that the formidable challenge Hmong American students face in school can lead to isolation, confusion, uncertainty, and ultimately failure in school (Kwon, 2006; Vang, 2001).

Academic Language Deficiency

The National Literacy Panel for Language Minority Children and Youth explored and conducted an extensive review of various research studies pertaining to teaching literacy to language-minority children (August & Shanahan, 2010). About 83 relevant studies were drawn for quality and their serious concerns regarding effective instruction for English learners. The process of acquiring English proficiency required for English learners to be proficient in their listening, speaking, reading, and writing were investigated (California Department of Education, 2012). It was established that the main goal of English language development (ELD) was to ensure that students are provided
with effective instructional strategies pertaining to the acquisition of the English language; hence, allowing students to develop the academic language needed to learn and access the core subjects of other learning disciplines such as English, Mathematics, Science, and History. Research studies in this sample found that English learners need a significant amount of time to reach proficiency in acquiring the English language.

One research study (Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000) looked at data from two school districts heavily impacted by English learners in California to draw conclusions on the length of time it takes for English Learners to attain oral English proficiency and academic English proficiency. Of the collected data, Hakuta et al. (2000) found that it took between two to five years to develop oral English proficiency. On the other hand, it took between four to seven years to develop academic English proficiency. In addition, English learners who were poor, on average, learned English more slowly and were the ones most in need of special support. In short, it takes much longer to acquire academic English than colloquial oral English, and, therefore, quite frequently it takes many English learners much longer to catch up to native-speakers in academic skills.

Similarly, Cummins’s (1984) analysis of English learners showed that even though English learners could converse easily and could rapidly acquire conversational English fluency, in general, it took a minimum of about five years to attain the academic aspects of the language to accomplish academic tasks. Likewise, it takes Hmong American students much longer to develop the academic language and skills they need to be successful in school due to such factors as the disadvantage of poverty and the lack of
effective parental support due to language barriers. Hence, English language deficiency continues to be one of the greatest obstacles for Hmong American students, and such deficiency has led to a high number of Hmong American students with low academic achievement, lower test scores, and credit deficiencies in school (Vang, 2001). The acquisition fluency in academic English language is vital to the success of Hmong American students.

According to Lee (2005), many academic hardships that Hmong American students face are also due to lack of mastery in the English language. She further states that while many Hmong Americans, especially those of the second generation, are fluent in speaking English; they do not have the same level of fluency in reading and writing. Lee’s study compares two groups of Hmong American students. One group is the 1.5-generation, who is more traditional, and the other is the second generation, who are more Americanized. Her research finds that second generation Hmong American youth have more difficulty acquiring and learning academic English than the 1.5-generation group. Since the second generation Hmong American students are neither proficient in Standard English nor their native Hmong language, they do not have the native language skills necessary to help them learn English efficiently and effectively. They lack a solid grounding in either language. On the other hand, the 1.5-generation group can rely on their native language skills to support them in learning and retaining what they have learned.
Challenges of Hmong Parents and Their Children

Similar to their children, Hmong American parents are thrust into the American educational system, often illiterate in reading and writing, with limited prior vocational skills in the kinds of occupations which predominate in American society, and with limited experience to help their children succeed in school. Finn’s research (1999) involved around 60 Hmong American high school students in two high schools located in a west central Wisconsin urban area. Based on Finn’s Educator Survey and Educator Focus Group data, she concluded that despite having their children’s respect, Hmong parents’ traditional expectations often cause tremendous emotional strain and frustration on their children. Finn (1999) further indicated that through schooling in the western world, Hmong American children often become the link between their parents and the world around them. Responsibilities are shifted from parents to children, changing the dynamics of the family structure to where parents become dependent on their children for translating, mediating, and explaining their thoughts and ideas to others. This shift in roles and responsibilities also shifts the power from parents to their children, making interpretation of the new world challenging for both Hmong parents and their children.

O’Reilly (1998) also conducted a study employing quantitative and qualitative methods on Hmong American high school students in Eau Claire Area School district and Eau Claire North High school. Five unsuccessful Hmong American high school students were interviewed regarding their relationship with their parents. In this study, “unsuccessful” refers to a student who failed at least one semester course. According to
the data, four out of five students indicated that their relationship with their parents was improving; however, five out of five students shared that, at times, this relationship was strained mostly due to different perspectives and understanding of life in America. The loss of respect for elders is a prominent problem among Hmong youth because they adapt more quickly into mainstream culture than their parents. This eventually leads to “multi-generational households” with varying levels and degrees of adaptation (O’Reilly, 1998).

Lee (2005) conveys that Hmong American youth are highly influenced by the popular and consumer culture of mainstream America. Hmong American youth, as affirmed by Lee, spend a vast amount of time watching television, listening to popular music, and “hanging out” with friends at local shopping facilities. Consequently, the different values and goals from those of the Hmong families collide with that of the American mainstream culture, making communication between children and parents challenging and adapting to life in the United States difficult (Conroy, 2006). Although there are vast amounts of research studies regarding the positive impact that parents have on their children’s education, for Hmong parents, the painful shift to accommodate and survive in the mainstream culture has been a tremendous challenge.

Interviews conducted by Lee (2005) of school staff at University Heights High School (UHS) also found that low-income students such as Hmong American students are overlooked because of their parents’ limited capacity to support them. An interview with a staff member shared that low-income students’ parents “don’t do much and can’t because they don’t have the resources” (Lee, 2005, p. 38). Although staff members at
University Heights High School recognized that there was a need to involve Hmong parents at the school, this need had either been ignored or the school lacked the ability to reach out to them. Hmong parents, like other low-income parents, rarely initiate contact with the school unless they are directly requested by school officials. Most often such visits would have to involve academic problems or truancy issues (Lee, 2005).

Table 2 contains indications of the different cultural values and goals of the Hmong families (collectivist) in comparison to the American mainstream culture (individualist). Hmong families function as a collective group where cultural traditions are established to keep them together. In a sense, what an individual does can have a significant impact on the entire family or clan. As for many of the young Hmong Americans, their adaptation to the mainstream culture often makes them an individualist rather than a collectivist.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Society type</th>
<th>Value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individualist</td>
<td>Task-oriented, competition, Success school or career important, explicit verbal communication, emotional openness, conscious of time, Individual make own decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collectivist</td>
<td>Relationship-oriented, group accomplishment and harmony, helpfulness, interdependence, social, implicit nonverbal communication, emotional control, time is flexible, family involved in making decisions</td>
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Theme Four: Sources of Strength in Hmong American Culture and Community

In order to fully understand how Hmong American students perform in school academically, it is vital to not only recognize the challenges, but also know the sources of strength of the students as well. Ngo and Lee (2007) found through other researchers (McNall, Dunnigan, & Mortimer, 1994; Rumbaut, 1989) that Hmong American students are among some of the students who have higher educational aspirations, spend more time on their homework, and earn higher grade point averages than non-Hmong students. Hutchinson (1997) conducted a study on Hmong students in six school districts in Wisconsin and found that Hmong students’ educational performance levels prove that they are still making progress towards success regardless of being poor, early marriage, or still learning English as a second language in comparison to other children, including White students. Similarly, Call and McNall (1992) conducted a study comparing the academic success of poor Hmong students with the achievement of other poor non-Hmong in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area. They discovered that Hmong students have higher grade point averages and lower levels of behavior problems in school than other non-Hmong students of similar socioeconomic status. In another study conduct by Rumbaut (1995) on immigrant groups in California, he also found that even though Hmong students did not perform well on the standardized test, they seem to earn good grades and are less likely to drop out of high school.

In explaining the educational success of Hmong American students, some researchers have pointed to the sources of strength in Hmong American culture and
community. As reported in Ngo and Lee (2007), in contrast to some research, which identified the barriers posed by Hmong culture, many researchers (Hutchinson, 1997; Rumbaut, 1989) have reported on the aspects of Hmong culture that have made a positive impact on the educational performance of Hmong American youth, whether it is directly and indirectly. For instance, in comparing patterns of educational achievement among Southeast Asian students, Rumbaut (1989) concluded that Hmong, Vietnamese, and ethnic Chinese from Vietnam share a similar family structure, which includes the constant parental push, close supervision, and control of their children. As a result, this family structure has made a positive impact on the students’ behavior and academic performance in school. In addition, Hutchinson (1997) also reported that Hmong students have more social and family support than other teens.

Ngo and Lee (2007) point out that a growing body of research such as Gibson (1988), Portes and Rumbaut (2001), and Zhou and Bankston (1998) suggested Hmong students who are bicultural are the most successful. According to McNall et al. (1994), Hmong American students who adopt a strategy of accommodation without assimilation tend to be more successful and excel in school academically and in their new country. Furthermore, Lee (2005) discovered that the most academically successful Hmong high school students are those who adopt the strategy of selective acculturation. Bosher (1997) conducted a quantitative study of Hmong American college students that examined the relationship of native language maintenance, self-esteem, and academic success, and found that “students who are successful academically have been able to
adapt to American culture without giving up their native culture or ethnic identification” (p. 601).

The strong core belief of the Hmong American parents and community that education is a route out of poverty is also another source of strength and/or community cultural wealth, according to Ngo and Lee (2007). According to Shade (1997):

Hmong value their history and cultural traditions. They value family and children, fidelity and loyalty. They value personal honor and responsibility, honesty and good citizenship. They value religion and the spiritual life. They value hard work and recognize the necessity of a good education as the means to economic success in the United States. (p. 110)

Hmong American parents want their children to work hard and be successful in school because they understand that their children will have a better life if they become wage earners or businessmen in the United States (Vang, 1991). One of the preferred ways for Hmong parents or elders to remind and compare life in the mountains of Laos and life in the cities of the United States is through a popular Hmong proverb,

“Lub ntuj thaum ub, yuav khwv kom tau noj tau haus ces yuav khwv tuaj ntawm tus ko hlau; lub ntuj tshiab tam sim no yuav khwv kom tau noj tau haus ces yuav khwv tuaj ntawm tus mem lub hau”
(Life in the past, in the mountains of Laos, if you wanted to make a good living, you had to work hard at holding a handle of a grubbing hoe. Life in the new country, if you want to have a good life, you will have to work hard at holding a pen).

In order for Hmong American students to draw upon these sources of community cultural wealth and to have a deep connection and understanding of the oral tradition of teaching and storytelling, it is important for Hmong students to maintain fluency in the Hmong language.
Drawing upon Yosso’s concept of family and community cultural wealth such as: (1) aspirational capital, (2) linguistic capital, (3) familial capital, (4) social capital, (5) navigational capital, and (6) resistant capital, the Hmong family and community share various kinds of cultural wealth that provide support for Hmong American students, particularly when students are able to participate in the life of the community and to communicate across generations using the Hmong language. Also, when they are grounded in the traditions of their Hmong community culture, they can begin to reinforce what they know and support each other. The ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even when facing financial hardship and language barriers; the academic and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language; the valuable support of family kinship; and the social network of people within the Hmong community have played a very significance role in the academic and personal success of young Hmong American students.

Theme Five: Strategies for Raising the Academic Achievement of Hmong American Students

Those intellectuals and educators who are concerned with the current and future crucial issues of Hmong people should use their skills, knowledge and leadership roles to determine the unsolved public issues and problems which we are facing today in the real world. (Vang, 1991, p. i)

There are a number of complex conditions that influence school failure and success. However, there is also a growing awareness that teachers and schools have tremendous influence on the academic success and failure of students (Nieto, 2004). The
idea of cultural pluralism suggests that within a society, people of different ethnic and cultural traditions such as language, religion, and/or food preferences are valued and sustained, meanwhile conforming to certain rules that are necessary for survival of the society as a whole (Bennett, 1999). Hmong as an ethnic group is unique in religion, language, and traditions, and for the most part, still adhere to traditional attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors. Despite the quick adaptation to the mainstream culture, it is important that Hmong American students preserve their cultural identity, maintain their primary language, and are educated with best practices designed for empowering students to learn and achieve at their highest potentials. Clearly, much work remains to be done in finding new, creative, and innovative ways to teach Hmong American students in order for them to strive for academic excellence in America.

*Preserving Cultural Identity*

Research (Lee, 2001; Moua, 2007; Va, 1998) shows that Hmong American students have higher academic achievement when parents practice accommodation and acculturation without assimilation. Moua (2007) conveys the experiences and challenges of Hmong American students in their educational pursuits and finds strong evidence that those who assimilated to the American culture and/or lost their home language struggled socially, emotionally, and academically; hence, contributing to a lack of understanding of their own culture, language, and where they come from. Cha (2010), a high school teacher working with Hmong American high school students for the past 14 years stated, “I truly believe that when Hmong students know who they really are, they behave better,
and they are more eager to learn. This is one more reason why we need to preserve the Hmong culture” (p. 2). Ngo and Lee (2007) also found that Hmong American students are less likely to join gangs if they are culturally connected to their families and are aware of who they are (Bosher, 1997; Lee, 2005; McNall et al., 1994). Delpit (1988) also argued the students’ heritage language and culture are intimately connected to their community, love ones, and personal identity. Fluency in the Hmong heritage language is clearly an important vehicle for expressing the family’s expectations and support, which Ngo and Lee (2007) have discovered to be positively associated with academic success (Bosher, 1997; Lee, 2005; McNall et al., 1994).

Further explorations of the extent of acculturation of academically successful Hmong American high school students also show that adapting to life in new conditions is a characteristic of the Hmong. However, a Hmong cannot live in isolation “from his or her people without his or her morale being hurt, life disrupted, and future affected” (Mueller, 2001, p. 27). On the other hand, it is essential to understand that although culture may influence the things student do, it does not determine who they are. As Nieto simply puts it, “Culture is neither static nor deterministic; it give us just one way in which to understand differences among students” (Nieto, 2004, p. 148). Language minority students often struggle with their teacher’s common perception that differences in their cultural values mean there exists a certain level of deficiencies in their ability to learn and achieve in school. However, according to research, such view only limits a teacher’s ability to see the full potential of a student to learn and excel in school.
In the case study of Hoang Vinh, a Vietnamese high school senior, Nieto (2004) conveyed that culture is very important to immigrant students. “Teachers just understand some things outside, but they cannot understand something inside our hearts” (Nieto, 2004, p. 144). Through Hoang’s interview, he shares that a good teacher is sensitive and understands his students both culturally and academically. A good teacher, according to Hoang, is someone who can relate his teaching to other people’s cultures and allows opportunities for meaningful discussions and teaches for meaning and understanding, not just simply doing repetitive seatwork or copying assignments off of the chalkboard. Hoang expresses a strong desire for teachers to understand his culture and be sensitive to the difficulty of learning a second language. Continuing to rely on his family and culture was a way for Hoang to survive and adjust to the difficulty of learning and achieving in high school with limited English proficiency. Nieto (2004) expressed, “abandoning one’s culture and language is too high a price to pay for academic success and social acceptance (p. xxvii).

Addressing the academic needs of Hmong American high school students requires multiple efforts from the local educational institutional level to the federal government levels. First, it is important to enhance the US history content standards. For example, the California Assembly Bill (AB78) was introduced and amended on July 2003. The purpose of this bill was to introduce the "Secret War" (1961-1973) in Laos as a part of the curriculum in social science or in history in the California public school system from 7th to 12th grade. A curriculum was put together by a team of experts and is available for
schools to use. Second, recently, school districts with large number of Hmong American students enrolled have adopted and offered Hmong as World Language Courses of Study for their high school students as a one way of satisfying the foreign language part of the high school graduation requirements. Lastly, the California State Board of Education approved regulations for the implementation of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in the spring 2004. In these regulations, for the first time the Hmong language was included as a part of the California Subject Examinations for Teachers (CSET) test for single subject teaching credential. Since there has not been any Commission on Teacher Credential (CTC)-approved subject matter preparation program at the university for Hmong language teachers, the subject matter examination is very important for increasing the number of teachers who can teach Hmong language courses. Efforts by legislatures, educational agencies and/or schools such as those described here set the foundation for Hmong American students to preserve their history, culture, and heritage language. Lee (2001) stated:

To make these students full citizens in the schools that are intended to serve them, a number of things are necessary: educators who understand and respect their culture and the difficulties they face in their homes as they try to straddle the gulf between their culture and the larger American society; a curriculum that reflects their history; and a sense of inclusion in the school community at large. (p. 20)

**Maintaining Heritage/Primary Language**

According to the United Nations’ (2008) indigenous people and their languages are endangered around the world and that is a human rights issue under international law. This is a concern because when indigenous people lose their languages, traditional
knowledge, cultural diversity and spirituality will also disappear. Furthermore, the group recommends that language rights must be implemented as a collective and an individual right and that heritage language needs to be seen as an asset rather than a deficiency.

Blanchard (1999, 2012) points out that to advocate for equitable educational opportunities and the right to culture for ethnic, religious or linguistic minority persons, the United Nations General Assembly adopted two covenants in 1966. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) was one of the two covenants and was the greatest support for minorities and indigenous people seeking to make a different in the education provided to their children and have been ratified with the advice and consent of the United States Senate, according to Blanchard (2012). More specifically, Article 27 of the ICCPR points out that ethnic, religious or linguistic minority persons have the rights to enjoy their own culture and to use their own language. Indeed, the human right to have the support of the society’s educational institutions to maintain one’s heritage language is an important human right.

The indigenous language concern that has been addressed by the United Nations is also a concern matter for Hmong Americans students as well. According to McCarty (2011), the longitudinal data of the bilingual-bicultural program from the Navajo community school at Rock Point, Arizona, indicated that students in the program outperformed the comparable Navajo students in the English-only programs and they surpassed their own previous annual growth rates and those of comparison-group students in the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools year after year. Furthermore, the
finding from the study also indicates that students were able to respond and articulate content abstract concepts more fully when their vernacular was used (McCarty, 2011). Finally, McCarthy (2011) contended, “in addition to learning English, of course, these students had the benefit of becoming bilingual and biliterate, an approach referred to as additive bilingualism, denoting the fact that one or more languages are added to learners’ pre-existing communicative repertoires” (p. 5). In conclusion, one of the most important themes from the program was that students can be successful, and it does not matter where they are from or what language they speak.

The Hmong people’s culture, language, and spirituality have totally been uprooted when immigrating to the United States. In order for them to survive, they have had to learn and adapt to their new environment as quickly as possible. This means that Hmong children have had to relearn everything anew, including learning a new system of reading and writing, the English language. Consequently, for young Hmong Americans who were born in the United States, their heritage language is most likely to diminish at an even faster rate than other immigrant groups. Other immigrant groups, moreover, have typically had more resources for helping their children to retain their heritage language. For example, Fillmore (2000) points out that the community of origin can play a big role in term of supporting heritage language and cultural programs for some immigrant groups. However, for Hmong American students, they have no accessible homeland and/or country to return to for sustaining their language and/or the cultural
values of their people. In general, the only resources that they have are their parents, relatives, friends, and the immediate community that they live in.

Cha (2010) also notes that there are no Sunday or private schools in the Hmong American community for parents to send their children to. The public school system in general also does not offer lessons pertaining to Hmong culture for Hmong American students. This study will demonstrate that the Hmong as World Language courses offered as a part of the high school graduation requirements, offer one of the most important and reliable avenues for Hmong American high school students to have the opportunity to learn Hmong heritage language, culture, and/or history.

Research has further indicated that some third generation immigrant groups are able to still hold on to their ethnic language (Alba, Logan, Lutz, & Stults, 2002; Portes & Hao, 1998). A study conducted by Cha (2010) included Hmong high school seniors who had been enrolled at Lucky Banks High School (LBHS) continuously since 9th grade. The make-up of the students included those who never took a Hmong language class and those who took at least one year, two years, or three years of Hmong language classes at the high school level. According to Cha, the level of participation in a Hmong language class had a significant influence on Hmong students’ academic success and personal growth. Cha further explained that the Hmong language classes also had a positive impact on Hmong students’ progress in both grade point average and the California Standards Test, and that students’ grades improved over the course of their high school years.
For those Hmong students who took Hmong language classes, they also exhibited more confidence in themselves, in their ability to speak, read, and write in their primary language, and that they were highly interested in pursuing a higher education beyond the high school level. Heritage language, as demonstrated by research, enables Hmong American students to be more successful in life and in school (Cha, 2010). They must know who they are and where they come from, understand of how they are connected to other important people or events in their life, have a sense of belonging, have the ability to problem-solve, or know their responsibility as a Hmong in the family and community (Fillmore, 2001). To acquire these important elements of their community’s cultural wealth, they require a knowledge of and facility in their heritage language. The findings by Wright and Taylor (1995), support the assertion, “heritage language education can have a positive effect on the personal and collective self-esteem of minority language students-a benefit not provided by 2nd language instruction” (p. 251). Cummins (1996) has expressed:

When students’ language, culture and experience are ignored or excluded in classroom interactions, students are immediately starting from a disadvantage. Everything they have learned about life and the world up to this point is being dismissed as irrelevant to school learning; there are few points of connection to curriculum materials or instruction and so students are expected to learn in an experiential vacuum. Students’ silence and nonparticipation under these conditions have frequently been misinterpreted as lack of academic ability or effort, and teachers’ interactions with students have reflected a pattern of low expectations, which become self-fulfilling. (pp. 2-3)

According to available research, when ethno-linguistic minority children reject their own cultural values and practices for those of the prestigious, dominant group, the
second language eventually replaces their native language (Lee 1996; Wong-Fillmore, 1991). Wong-Fillmore (1991) states that “The consequences of losing a primary language are far reaching, and it does affect the social, emotional, cognitive, and educational development of language-minority children, as well as the integrity of their families and the society they live in” (p. 342). Hmong American students attend school during the day, but when they are home during the evening or weekend, they often participate in important cultural events such as spiritual healing, ancestors’ blessing, soul calling, weddings, and/or funeral ceremonies with family members. They also are embraced within the extended family or clan, which is a foundational Hmong institution. The better developed their conceptual understanding and fluency in the Hmong language, the more satisfying and beneficial it will be for them to participate in these cultural events.

Likewise, the better developed the conceptual foundation of Hmong children’s first language; the more likely the children are to develop similarly high levels of conceptual abilities in their second language (Cummins, 1994; McCarty, 2011). Moreover, early language shift can affect language skills transfer, literacy progress in the L2, and more detrimental overall cognitive development and parent-child relationships (Cummins, 1994; Wong-Fillmore 1991). In order for Hmong American students to perform at peak level academically, it is essential that they learn the academic language and academic writing as soon as possible. Research in other language groups suggests
that thorough grounding in their home language will in fact facilitate their acquisition of academic language and academic writing skills (McCarty, 2011; Shade, 1997).

Teachers and administrators may decide to move Hmong American students who have a command of social communication skills in English out of language support services because they sound like native English speakers. However, having a command of Basic Intercommunication Skills (BICS) does not mean that students will have the necessary skills to complete the academic tasks well and excel in the classroom. Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) includes Standard English language for formal academic reading and writing in the content areas such as math, science, social studies and English literature (Crawford, 2004). Furthermore, students will need to be able to use CALP skills to compare, classify, synthesize, evaluate, and conclude in their studies. It is crucial for educators to understand the difference between (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) in order for them to support students more effectively (Crawford, 2004).

Research has identified a few strategies through which minority students can maintain their heritage languages. Fillmore (1991) contends that in order for children to maintain their heritage language, the families have to continue to reaffirm the importance of the heritage language in the home as they struggle with changes in their life circumstance. Fishman (1992) agrees, “the most critical factor in predicting whether a language will be maintained across generation is language practice in the home” (p. 263). Although the home plays a crucial role in supporting primary language development, it is
also significant to understand that for Hmong American high school students, another important opportunity is to learn the Hmong language more comprehensively in the High school world language courses. High school world language courses have been made available for high school students throughout the states as a means of addressing the requirement for study of a second language as one of the high school graduation requirements. According to Lucas and Katz (1994), when doing needs assessments and thinking about the best ways to help English Language Learners, it is essential for educators to remember that their heritage languages and cultures are crucial resources to draw upon for teaching both content and language.

**Best Practices and Effective Teaching Strategies**

As pointed out by Maslow (1970), before a person can manifest self-actualization, the lower or more basic needs must be satisfied. For Hmong American students, without effective classroom support from their teachers, they may never reach their highest level of achievement. An environment set for success requires that the teachers understand the cultural values and traditions that their students bring to the classroom and see such differences as strengths rather than weaknesses. Researchers (Krashen & Terrell, 1983) claim that for acquisition of any kind of knowledge to take place, the classroom must have a low-anxiety environment, promote a good rapport with the teacher, and encourage friendly relationships with other students. Beside this, learning activities must also be interesting and focus on topics relevant to the students, which allow ample opportunities for them to express their ideas, opinions, desires, emotions, and feelings.
O’Reilly (1998) conducted multiple interviews with both successful and unsuccessful Hmong American high school students at North High School in Eau Claire, Wisconsin and found that five out of five of the successful Hmong American high school students claim they have done well because of extra program supports such as homework assistance, extra-curricular activities and sports, and mentoring programs, which nurture academic growth and a sense of safety, wellbeing and accomplishment. Such support is a practical method for Hmong American students because it connects them with the school. An investigation of successful postsecondary Hmong American students also reported that the feeling of isolation and not having academic connections with others led many of them to complete their postsecondary degrees at a slower pace; those who were able to network and make educational relationships, find themselves with fewer challenges and excel at their higher education pursuits at a faster pace (Moua, 2007).

Nieto (2004) stated, “Although children from different linguistic backgrounds might not have the specific skills called for in school, they do have attitudes, skills, and capabilities that can be used in the service of their learning” (p. 326). In other words, they bring an alternate set of cultural capital from the cultural wealth of their home community (Yosso, 2005), which their teachers need to recognize and build upon. In order to increase the academic achievement level of Hmong American students, there should not only be focus on high standards, providing a challenging curriculum, and having quality teachers, but the learning and cultural styles of Hmong American students must be respected and valued. For example, when teaching Hmong American students to
write a well written essay, it is important to demonstrate the process through teacher modeling, utilization of visuals and graphic organizers, and to provide plenty of kinesthetic opportunities where students are involved in the demonstrations of the lesson. Recent studies have articulated that second-language learners require a rich language environment in order for learning to take place and that the learners need to be exposed to a variety of authentic input through multiple means such as books, songs, pictures, charts, audiotapes, and/or visual arts (CDE, 2010).

There are two factors of background knowledge that influence successful learning. The first one is one’s ability to process and store information. The other is one’s level of academically oriented experiences. Marzano (2004) pointed out that the level of both factors has great influences on the development of a student’s background knowledge and concluded, “Differences in these factors create differences in students’ academic background knowledge and, consequently, differences in their academic achievement” (p. 5). For the majority of Hmong American students, background knowledge relating to traditional school subjects such as mathematics, science, history, or language arts is extremely limited because of their limited formal educational background experiences and the impact of poverty on their ability to access academically oriented experiences in their daily lives. Enhancing and building background knowledge before teaching a new concept should never occur in isolation for Hmong American students. With their unique cultural and educational background experiences, Hmong American
students will need a variety of modalities of support from their teachers before accessing new ideas and concepts.

An examination of the influence of information-processing ability and the level of access to academically oriented experiences of a given student on his/her level of achievement is shown in Table 3. According to Marzano (2004), students such as Delbert, Gina, and Iris are in a disadvantaged position due to either a lack of informational processing ability or lack of access to academically oriented experiences, and often times, it is due to a lack of both factors. Students such as Delbert, Gina, and Iris are, according to Marzano, living in poverty where opportunities are usually limited to them. In addition, the most favorable position to be is in Allen’s spot of table 3. Allen is most likely to learn and achieve at a high level due to his high level of background knowledge in both information-processing ability and access to academically oriented experiences. The next two favorable positions to be are in Barbara’s and Calvin’s position. Although they are blessed with slightly different factors from Allen, they both still have the capacity and ability to learn and be more successful than that of the other students.
Hollingsworth and Ybarra (2009) conducted several studies where they looked at millions of student assignments, disaggregated millions of test scores, and observed thousands of classroom lessons and conclude that students learn more and faster with explicit teaching. According to Hollingsworth and Ybarra (2009), explicit and direct instructions are well designed and well delivered lessons that explicitly teach grade level content to all students. Overall, classroom instruction needs to be highly effective and efficient where students can learn quickly and remember what they are taught (Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2009). Simply put, a teacher’s “entire explicit and direct instruction is designed to teach the students how to successfully complete the independent practice” (p. 204). Hence, during each step of delivering the instruction, the teacher must monitor student learning by teaching first before asking students questions about what they are learning.
To succeed in school, Hmong American students must gain a comprehensive knowledge of the English language. The model for explicit language instruction is based on the goal of promoting full English proficiency in English learners where explicit instruction is an effective instructional strategy for the development of the English language (Dutro & Kinsella, 2010). As English learners, Hmong American students have specific needs as second language learners. Lessons need to be tailored specifically to meet their needs in order for them to make substantial academic gain. Hmong American students learn best when the teacher provides learning opportunities where they are presented with examples and direct instruction with clear explanations. In addition, direct instruction in the Hmong language when it is taught as a world heritage language provides the opportunity to consciously compare and contrast grammatical rules, structures of different kinds of communication. This comparison provides a greater knowledge of the familiarity within the unique features of each language. It is crucial to the academic success of Hmong American students when the teacher continually verifies or checks for understanding throughout the lesson, provides supportive feedback on student errors, and allows opportunities for them to practice what is being taught. Table 4 contains the specific lesson design components of explicit and direct instruction while Table 5 shows the delivery strategies that are incorporated in each lesson.
### Table 4

**Explicit Lesson Design Components**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Description of Component</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning Objective</td>
<td>A statement describing what students will be able to do by the end of the lesson. It must match the Independent Practice and be clearly stated to the students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activate Prior Knowledge</td>
<td>Purposefully moving something connected to the new lesson from students’ long-term memories into their working memories so they can build upon existing knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept Development</td>
<td>Teaching students the concept contained in Learning Objective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill Development</td>
<td>Teaching students the steps or processes used to execute the skills in the Learning Objective. Teaching student how to do it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson Importance</td>
<td>Teaching students why the content in the lesson is important for them to learn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guided Practice</td>
<td>Working problems <em>with</em> students at the same time, step-by-step, while checking that they execute each step correctly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson Closure</td>
<td>Having students work problems or answer questions to prove that they have learned the concepts and skills in the Learning Objective <em>before</em> they are given Independent Practice to do by themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Practice</td>
<td>Having students successfully practice exactly what they were just taught.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The Explicit Lesson Design Components were taken from the book, Explicit Direct Instruction (EDI): The Power of the Well-Crafted, Well-Taught Lesson (Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2009)
Table 5

*Lesson Delivery Strategies of Explicit and Direct Instruction*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Delivery Strategy</th>
<th>Description of Delivery Strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Check for Understanding</td>
<td>Continually verifying that students are learning while they are being taught</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explaining</td>
<td>Teaching by telling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling</td>
<td>Teaching using think-aloud to reveal to students the strategic thinking required to solve a problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrating</td>
<td>Teaching using physical objects to clarify the content and to support kinesthetic learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The Lesson Delivery Strategies of Explicit and Direct Instruction were taken from the book, *Explicit Direct Instruction (EDI): The Power of the Well-Crafted, Well-Taught Lesson* (Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2009)

Summary

Having one’s own home language be a part of the formal curriculum, integrating the student’s sense of self as a Hmong and academic person- “I am a Hmong American student,” is essential to successful academic performance and personal growth. The effort of schools to provide the Hmong language class experience for Hmong American students allows students to achieve the fourth level of Maslow’s (1954) hierarchy of needs: self-esteem, confidence, achievement, attention, reputation, respect of others, and respect by others. Such feelings can lead to feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, capability and adequacy of being useful and necessary in the world. Blanchard (1999,
points out that according to Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), one of the two covenants that was adopted by the United Nations to implement the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), ethnic, religious or linguistic minority persons have the rights to enjoy their own culture and to use their own language. The right of students to have the support of the society’s educational institutions to maintain their heritage language is an important and crucial human right.

For Hmong American high school students to have the opportunity to learn about their language, culture, and history in the Hmong language class is a great example of multicultural education. Multicultural education includes the idea that schools and school districts have the power and the ability to create policy and curriculum that address the needs of the students. In order to have a true multicultural society, contemporary school curriculum needs to include the history, values, knowledge, and action of the people of color and women, and that the discrepancies between the ideals of freedom and equality and realities of racism and sexism are taught to students (Banks, 2006; Bennett, 2010; Nieto, 2007).

Bourdieu (1986) states that the students’ home culture and experiences facilitate the interactions students have with schools and influence their academic performance. Inevitably, however, not all students come into the school already grounded in the cultural capital that the school often assumes as a given in their students’ development. Therefore, not all students equally understand how to interact effectively with the school
culture as expressed in the curriculum and student-teacher interactions. Fortunately, for Hmong American high school students, the Hmong language class offers a bridge that makes the connection between the home and school experiences for Hmong American students. The Hmong language class not only offers Hmong students a validation of their home culture and experience within the school setting, but also offers them the opportunity to learn their home language, culture, and history and to strengthen their own sense of community.

Cardenas and Cardenas (1977) assert that in order for minority students to perform at their highest level, the instructional program and the characteristics of the learner have to be compatible. In order to do this, it is necessary to first identify the incompatibilities before they can be eliminated. In the Hmong language class, students are not only able to learn about their language, culture, and history, but also learn problem-solving skills such as academic integration skills and other academic strategies to help them learn more effectively and efficiently in school. Indeed, Krashen (1997) contends that the knowledge language minority students attain in their primary language supports the acquisition and comprehension of English. Furthermore, according to Lev Vygotsky’s (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the more formal and analytical study of the Hmong language at the high school level supports the Hmong American academic novice, who can develop a higher level of expertise in formal expository writing that is applicable to the writing of academic English.
Looking from the perspective of Yosso’s (2005) concept of family and community cultural wealth, the availability of resources from the Hmong family and community play a huge role in supporting Hmong American students in school. One of the best ways for Hmong students to access these resources is for them to be proficient in the Hmong language and culture so that they can communicate and network with family and community members. Hence, allowing them the opportunity to participate and interact with various community events and functions. Ngo and Lee (2007) point to other researchers (Hutchinson, 1997; Rumbaut, 1989) who have reported on the aspects of Hmong culture that have made an impact on the educational performance of Hmong American youth, both directly and indirectly. One of the cultural aspects, for example, is the family organization, which includes the constant parental push, close supervision, and control of their children. This cultural aspect helps to shape students’ behavior and ultimately play a role in helping them to perform better in school.

Ngo and Lee (2007) also contend that Hmong American students who are bicultural are the most successful. According to McNall et al. (1994), Hmong American students who adopt a strategy of accommodation without assimilation tend to be more successful and excel in school academically and in their new country. Furthermore, Lee (2005) discovered that the most academically successful Hmong high school students are those who adopt the strategy of selective acculturation. Finally, Bosher (1997) conducted a quantitative study of Hmong American college students that examined the relationship of native language maintenance, self-esteem, and academic success, and found that
“students who are successful academically have been able to adapt to American culture without giving up their native culture or ethnic identification” (p. 601).

Conclusion

In order for educators, schools, districts, and/or educational policymakers to provide meaningful and quality educational opportunities and services for Hmong American students in the American educational system, it is critical and imperative for them to understand their needs, unique historical, linguistic, and cultural background, and teaching strategies that are most effective in helping them learn and excel in school. Furthermore, with limited literature relating to the academic teaching and learning of Hmong American students, this chapter two will serve as a purposeful research pertaining to Hmong American students. It is a combination of what other scholarly and professional research studies have to offer in support of language minority students who have similar history, language, and culture background to that of the Hmong American students.

As researchers have indicated in this chapter, the following approaches will benefit Hmong American high school students tremendously. First, both critical race and multicultural grounded education give Hmong American students the opportunity to learn about who they are, where they have been in the past, and where they will go in the future. Furthermore, they also provide a brief glance into the strengths and capabilities of Hmong American students to work hard in school in order to reach their goals and be
successful in life. Second, the theories of incompatibilities and bilingualism in educational paradigms argue that academic skills and cognitive development do transfer. As a result, one of the best pedagogies to teach Hmong American students is to use tools and methods that students are already familiar with or can relate to. Finally, drawing upon the cultural capital and community’s cultural wealth will enable schools to be more efficient and effective when teaching Hmong American students. Schools can draw upon students’ strengths and/or the resources that are already available in the family and/or the community. All schools have to do is initiate and create opportunities for bridging out to the community.

Since their arrival in the United States in 1975, throughout their K-12 education, Hmong American students learning opportunities have been involved with learning about other people’s language, history, and culture. They have never had the opportunity to learn about themselves through the relevancy of their own language, culture, and/or history. The Hmong as World Language class at the high school is the only curriculum that offers an opportunity for Hmong students to learn their language, culture, and history and to use their study of Hmong language to support their acquisition of academic English. The program has been made available recently to some students in certain high schools and/or school districts. However, not all Hmong American students have access to this class because not all schools/districts offer it.

This research includes both a qualitative and quantitative study of the impacts of the study of Hmong language on high school students who have taken this class for at
least two years. Its intent is to enrich the body of research studies pertaining to Hmong American students in the United States and to seek for creative, innovative, and practical ways to meet their educational needs. It is the hope of this research study to support and sustain the academic achievement and success of all Hmong American students, so they can become productive and contributing citizens in the communities that they live in.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

One Saturday in the spring of 1995, the researcher attended a Hmong American community meeting in the South Sacramento area. He had learned that a large number of Hmong high school students from BB High School continued to face many challenges in school and as a result they performed very poorly in school in several ways – grades, truancy, misbehavior, gang activity, dropping out, among others. Community leaders and parents of the students were very concerned, frustrated, and felt hopeless because they felt that they could not do much to change the situation at home, in the community, or at school.

BB High School was the high school in the ABC School District that had the largest Hmong American student enrollment. At the time, about twenty percent of the school’s student population was Hmong American students. Unfortunately, the school did not have any Hmong teachers, counselors, or Hmong bilingual staff to work with Hmong American students, parents, and/or the community. There were serious and chronic problems facing Hmong American students. Students were involved with gang activities both on the school campus and in the community. Many students were involved with fighting on school ground, suspensions, expulsions, truancies, and/or
dropouts. Even those students that did not affiliate with gangs did not perform well in school. The researcher wanted to find a solution to these problems.

The researcher was teaching in another school district in northern California at the time of the community meeting, but in the summer of 1995, he decided to leave his current job. The researcher applied to the new school district-- the subject of this study-- for a teaching position at BB High School. He was hired and began to work immediately. His intention was to work with school and district officials to develop educational programs for Hmong American high school students and to recruit more Hmong teachers at the high school levels. The researcher’s goal was to reduce or eliminate gang problems in the schools and in the community, and ultimately to increase students’ academic performance. During the fall of 1995, two Hmong language classes were created and offered to students as elective courses as a part of the general requirements for high school graduation. Ten years later, two full-time Hmong teachers and four levels of Hmong as World Language courses were finally offered for students in the school district. As the interview data associated with this study indicated, the gang problems both in the community and school have decreased and more Hmong American students have obtained good grades in school. As a result, more Hmong students have graduated from high school and continued to go on to college.

The goal of this study was to learn more about the various factors affecting the developmental and educational outcomes of Hmong American high school students after the establishment of the Hmong language courses. In particular, the research explored
the effects of Hmong American students’ participation in at least two years of studying Hmong as a world language during their high school careers. In conducting this research, the researcher examined student outcomes from an analysis of regularly maintained data from the urban school district. Also examined were the experiences of young adult Hmong Americans who have successfully completed their high school careers and have participated in a Hmong language class. Additionally, the insights and experiences of two teachers who have taught Hmong as a world language in the urban California public high school were analyzed. The researcher hoped to identify resiliency factors that positively affect school outcomes for Hmong American students and, in particular, the role which the formal study of their Hmong language plays in such resiliency. Also, the researcher hoped to gain an insight into the role of Hmong language study on strengthening young Hmong Americans’ connectedness with their home community and their successful adaptation to the larger American society.

The goal of this chapter is to discuss the appropriate methodology for this kind of a study including research design, role of the researcher, and data collection. The review of methodological literature discusses the strengths and limitations of the quantitative methods and qualitative approaches to complex human situations. Some qualitative strategies for exploring the Hmong American student experience such as thick description of cross-cultural intersections and focus groups interviews are also discussed. Next, the research design provides descriptions of the research instrumentation, population characteristics, and sampling method. Furthermore, the discussion of the role
of the researcher, insider and outsider positionality, and reliability and validity issues affecting situated research are included. Finally, the chapter discusses the data collection, which includes the collection of quantitative and qualitative data.

Methodology Literature Review

Utility of Mixed Method Research

As pointed out by Gowin and Millman (1969), a method is “a procedural commitment, a collection of techniques or ways of doing things that may be generalized or made common to a variety of situations. A method involves regular steps, planned sequences, ordered phases, and related stages of inquiry” (p. 556). When conducting studies, researchers have many choices of picking their methods. For instance, researchers can choose a qualitative, a quantitative, or a mixed method. In this study, a mixed method was used to conduct the research.

Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2006) point out, "a mixed methods research question combines or mixes both the quantitative and qualitative research questions. Moreover, a mixed methods research question necessitates that both quantitative data and qualitative data be collected and analyzed" (p. 483). The benefit of having both the qualitative and quantitative types of questions is that the questions will enable researchers to explore phenomena to a greater degree. Researchers suggest that using mixed methods techniques results in richer data being collected which leads to a greater understanding of underlying phenomena (Powell, Mihalas, Onwuegbuzie, Suldo, & Daley, 2008). Lieber’s
(2009) study also supports this argument. Lieber reported, “blending qualitative and quantitative approaches within a single study can yield more comprehensive findings than research employing only one methodological perspective” (p. 226). However, while it is increasingly desirable to incorporate methods in research, there are many questions the researcher must address in deciding how best to design, carry out, and analyze the data generated by mixed methods projects (Liever, 2009).

Due to the limited nature of Hmong American students’ achievement data and the complexity of the many dimensions of these students’ lives that are affected by their development within the school context, the community context, the family context, and within the dynamics are the larger society, it is best for this study to use a mixed method. The theoretical base of this mixed method of qualitative data collected from teachers and students interviews and quantitative analysis of student achievement records is grounded in the work of Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) and Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2010). They argue that one of the best ways to address a gap in literature is through a mixed method of study.

Quantitative and Qualitative Research Designs: Strengths and Limitations of Each

In quantitative research, the process of measurement is central to the study because it provides the fundamental connection between empirical observation and mathematical expression of quantitative relationships. According to Shadish et al. (2002), quantitative research refers to the systematic empirical investigation of social phenomena such as mathematical, statistical, or computational techniques. The purpose
of quantitative research is to develop and employ mathematical hypotheses, theories, and/or models pertaining to phenomena (Shadish et al., 2002). In quantitative research, studies aim to determine the relationship between an independent variable and a dependent or outcome variable in a population. The two research designs in quantitative research are either descriptive or experimental. Subjects are usually measured once in a descriptive study and the study establishes only associations between variables. However, in experimental studies, subjects are measured before and after a treatment.

In this study, the descriptive quantitative research method was utilized to determine the relationship between the independent variable which was the Hmong language classes that Hmong American students took for two years, and the dependent or outcome variables in the population, which included students’ GPA, CST results in ELA and Mathematics, English proficiency levels, school attendance, and high school graduation. Using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software program to perform statistical analysis, the quantitative method analyzed the answers to the following question: As a result of taking two year of Hmong as World Language courses in high school, do the results show any significant association with measures of Hmong American high school students’ academic success?

The kinds of questions that the quantitative analysis had a harder time answering included many which were central to this research: 1) What do the students understand as their major challenges in succeeding in high school? 2) What factors do these students identify as contributing to their success in school academically? 3) What
recommendations would these students who have recently completed their high school education suggest to the schools to improve their educational programs? 4) What experiences and recommendations do these recent graduates who participated in the Hmong world language program have to share with other incoming Hmong American high school students so they can be more successful in school? 5) Do these students now have a greater sense of integration between their Hmong American community identity and their American public school student identity?

Qualitative research investigates the what, where, when, why and how of decision making. Researchers may use different approaches in collecting data, such as classical ethnography, shadowing, narrative analysis, or storytelling. Qualitative studies focus on smaller samples but may offer a richer and fuller understanding of education. Jacob (1987) argues that qualitative traditions presents varied approaches to research and that tradition forms a well-connected whole, comprising internally consistent assumptions about human nature and society, foci of study, and methodology.

Some Qualitative Strategies for Exploring the Hmong American Student Experience

In this study, the qualitative research method allowed the researcher to examine and to look more deeply into the Hmong American student experience during their four years in high school. The student experience in high school was examined from two different perspectives: two Hmong language teachers and the targeted student population. The two teachers were interviewed as a group separately (Fontana & Frey,
The questions were asked from a trained professional and a Hmong teacher’s perspective based on their daily classroom observations and their contacts and/or involvement with the Hmong American community.

As an additional qualitative component to the study, a total of eight recent high school graduates were interviewed in a focus group process (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). Through open-ended questions students were asked about their experiences in high school and especially their experience relating to the Hmong language classes that they took in high school. Students expressed not only to the researcher, but also to each other, their thoughts and feelings about their needs, challenges, successes, and how they overcame their challenges. In the end, the student focus group interviews produced two very important outcomes. They provided insights and recommendations for the school and district to improve their educational programs and to help future Hmong American high school students be more successful in school and have a better future. Equally important, they demonstrated how centering a culturally-connected Hmong language program in the school setting encouraged students to come back to help build a better Hmong American community and to contribute to the community at large.

*Thick Description of Cross-cultural Intersections*

According to Ponterotto (2006), the term “thick” description became part of the qualitative researcher’s vocabulary when Geertz borrowed Ryle’s (1971) philosophical term to describe the work of ethnography. The term “thick description” was used by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz in his *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973) to describe his
own method of conducting ethnographic research (Geertz, 1973). Geertz practiced a level of ethnographic observation and analysis in which the social, cultural and interpersonal context of subjects actions, behaviors and words are incorporated into the subject matter of the research and the deeper social meaning of statements and actions are used to interpret the social and cultural meaning of human interactions. In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard (Denzin, 1989). Thick description builds up a clear picture of the individuals and groups in the context of their culture and the setting in which they live (Holloway, 1997).

In order to conduct meaningful and valid research on the high school experience of Hmong American high school students, it was important to provide the students the opportunity to tell their stories and share their experiences. Through thick description, the researcher was able to explore phenomena and draw conclusions beyond just the surface appearance of the quantitative data. This study’s methods allowed students to express their feelings regarding webs of social relationships that connected them with the school staff, educational programs, and other students. Furthermore, thick description captured the students’ emotions and feelings. It established the significance of their experience or the sequence of events for the person or persons in question.

Focus Groups

Different types of interviewing are suited to different situations. Since the researcher was interested in the opinions of the Hmong American high school students regarding their high school experience, and their thoughts about the educational programs
at their former high school, a focus group interview provided the most meaningful results. According to Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005), “focus groups are collective conversations or group interviews. They can be small or large, directed or nondirected” (p. 887). Focus groups have also allowed researchers to explore the nature and effects of ongoing social discourse in ways that are not possible through individual interviews or observations (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). Focus groups, while functioning as sites for consolidating collective identities and enacting political work, also allow for the proliferation of multiple meanings and perspectives as well as for interactions between and among the participants. Because “focus groups put multiple perspectives “on the table,” they help researchers and research participants alike to realize that both the interpretations of individuals and the norms and rules of groups are inherently situated, provisional, contingent, unstable, and changeable” (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 904).

Summary of Methodology Literature and General Research Approach

This chapter started by discussing the history of the Hmong language program development and the many challenging issues facing Hmong American high school students and their parents both at school and in the community. The range and depth of challenges, and the lack of research in this area, led the researcher to choose a mixed method design. Next, the chapter presented a review of methodological literature which a focus on the mixed, quantitative, and qualitative methods of the present study. The researcher briefly described the strength and limitation of each of these methods.
Furthermore, some qualitative strategies for exploring the Hmong American student experience were discussed. It ended with the discussion why thick description of cross cultural intersections and focus groups are important tools to use to conduct this research study involving Hmong American high school students.

Research Design

Instrumentation

The quantitative analysis in this study aimed at determining the relationship between the independent variable, which was the Hmong language classes that Hmong American students took for two years, and the dependent or outcome variables which included the students’ GPA, CST results in ELA and Mathematics, English proficiency levels, school attendance, and high school graduation. The *ex post facto* data for both the independent and dependent variables were obtained from the target school district’s database. The widely used Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software program was used to perform the statistical analysis to answer the following question: As a result of taking two year of Hmong as World Language courses in high school, do the results show any significant correlations on measures of Hmong American high school students’ academic success?

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the Hmong American high school students’ experience during their four years in high school, interviews of the two Hmong language teachers from the district and a focus group interview process involving recent Hmong American high school graduates from the target student populations were
conducted as a part of the qualitative study. First, the interviews of the two teachers were conducted as a group but separately from the high school students (Fontana & Frey, 1994). The responses from the teachers are vital to this study. The teacher interview questions are discussed from the perspective of trained professionals and Hmong teachers’ perspectives based on their daily classroom and school observations and their contact and/or involvement with the Hmong American community. Next, eight recent high school graduate young Hmong Americans were interviewed through a focus group process (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). The purpose of this focus group is to ask young Hmong American recent high school graduates to reflect with each other about their high school experiences and the effect of those experiences on their current lives. The results help improve educators’ understanding of the academic and socio-cultural needs of Hmong American high school students. Students were asked through open-end questions in a focus group setting about their experiences in high school and especially their experiences relating to the Hmong language classes that they took in high school (see Appendices A and B).

Population

The population studied includes all recent young Hmong American recent high school graduates in the target school district who have met the following four criteria: 1) students who were seniors during the school year of 2009-2010; 2) students who were classified as Hmong as their ethnicity; 3) students who had the California Standardized Test results in English Language Arts and Mathematics for the school years of 2006-
2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-2009; 4) students who had identified themselves as an Initial Fluent English Proficient (IFEP) or as an English Learner (EL) through the Home Language Survey (HLS) process when they registered for school. According to the California Department of Education (2011), an EL is a K-12 student who, based on objective assessment, has not developed listening, speaking, reading, and writing proficiencies in English sufficient for participation in the regular school program. These students are sometimes referred to as Limited English Proficient (LEP). Students who did not have one of the stated criteria above have been excluded from this study. A total of 130 students have met the above criteria and are included in this study. Because of limitations in the data to which the researcher has access, the population does not include Hmong American youth from this age group who dropped out of school at a point, which resulted in their not being a part of the data set provided to the researcher. Likewise, the population of the study does not include cohorts of Hmong American students at different time periods than the one under study. Nonetheless, the researcher anticipates that the findings of this study will be helpful in understanding the situation of these other groups of young Hmong Americans.

Sampling

The sample for the quantitative data was obtained from the targeted school district in northern California in the spring of 2010. The researcher worked together with the Research Specialist in the school district to identify and define what existing datasets would be needed to be retrieved from the district’s database. After more than three
months, a list comprising a total of 190 Hmong American high school seniors were identified and created. These datasets were made available to the researcher; however, the researcher discovered and realized that not all the data were ready for statistical analysis described in the instrumentation above. Errors were found in the student records and important student information from the Zangle database was missing. In order to have a clean and reliable set of data to work with, students that did not have completed and accurate information on their records were deleted from the list. In the end, records of 130 students remained and were used as a sample for this study. This constituted a large enough data set to conduct statistical analyses such as computing correlations between variables and regression analysis of variables with a reasonable degree of validity and reliability. In working with the data from this sample, the researcher particularly focused on data from the 2008-2009 school year.

The first qualitative data collection involved interviews with two teachers who have been teaching the Hmong language courses at the target high school for many years. The researcher had met and worked with the teachers in the past and had their contact information. The researcher invited the two teachers to participate in this study. The teachers agreed and an appointment was set. One week later, the interview was conducted with both teachers at the same time in an agreed, quiet location. A tape recorder was used to record the dialogues and it was later transcribed by the researcher.

The second qualitative data collection was a focus group interview, which included eight young Hmong Americans who recently graduated from high school. This
group was a subset of the 130 young Hmong American high school graduates in the original sampling. Since the young Hmong Americans are no longer minors and had already left the school district, parental approval was not needed. The participants included only those young adult Hmong American graduates who gave their informed consent to participate in the focus group process. The researcher made contact with these young Hmong American students through the various social networks in the Hmong American community and community at large.

During the fall of 2011, the researcher traveled to local Hmong community meetings and the Hmong New Year celebration at California Exposition, Consumnes River College, Sacramento City College, and Sacramento State to look for and/or meet young Hmong Americans who had recently graduated from the local high school in Sacramento, California. The researcher met with a total of 27 young Hmong American students who initially indicated a willingness to be a part of the small focus group interview process. Once the interview location was secured, the researcher made contact again with all potential participants to do a final check to see how many people would still be able to participate in the project. In the end, eight participants confirmed that they would be available and would still like to join the small focus group interviews. The researcher sought to recruit a diverse group for the focus group interview; however, the final make-up of the group included only one male and seven females. As will be discussed in the analysis of this paper, this gender breakdown is somewhat consistent with differences between male and female participation patterns that emerged in other
components of the study. Of the focus group participants, one young man and two young women were born in the United States and five young women were born outside the United States in refugee camps in Thailand.

Role of the Researcher: Insider/ Outsider Positionality

The researcher is a Hmong political refugee who came to the United States in 1979 at the age of 15. After arriving in the United States in the Midwest, the researcher’s family moved to California, ultimately settling in the Sacramento area. Going straight to high school to learn English and other academic content as a ninth grade student was challenging because the researcher completed only the fifth grade in Laos. He did not have the necessary English language and academic skills that would enable him to do the grade level work in high school. It would have been even more challenging for the researcher to complete the high school graduation requirements if not for the five years of formal schooling that he had before.

Despite the challenges of learning a new culture, language, and rigorous and complex academic skills and facing racial discrimination in high school and college, the researcher consistently strived toward learning and obtaining degrees in higher education so he can help himself, his family, the Hmong American community as well as the community at large, and be a good contributor to society. For a period of time, the researcher dropped out of college and obtained a job as an instructional bilingual aide and worked for an elementary school district in the north Sacramento area for many years. Based on their observations, the teachers the researcher worked with thought the
researcher had natural teaching talents and recommended that he go back to school so he could become a schoolteacher. After many years of hard work in college, the researcher graduated and went back to teach at the elementary school district as expected.

Researcher Connections to the HWL Class

As discussed elsewhere in this chapter and in the report generally, the researcher, like the subjects of the research, is a Hmong American who came to the United States as a refugee from the “Secret War” in Laos during the Vietnam War, via the refugee camps in Thailand (Murai, 2010). As will be further discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, this similarity in background between the researcher and the students whose experiences are the subject of this study has played a motivating role in the researcher’s choice of research methods and in his professional decisions.

In California, the researcher obtained his undergraduate degree, his teaching credential and master’s degree in multicultural education and an administrative credential in educational leadership and became a teacher and, later, administrator, in the public schools of the Sacramento area. Prior to moving to BB High School, the researcher was teaching for a different school district. He wanted to move up to the high school level because he was concerned about the problems faced by Hmong American students in the high schools of the city and wanted to make a difference for high school students; especially for Hmong American high school students who really needed his help. Hmong American high school students at BB High School continued to perform very poorly in school in many ways – grades, truancy, behavior, gang activity, dropping out, and so on,
but the school district had not to date experienced much success in improving the situation. Students were involved with gang activities not only on the school campus, but also in the community as well.

The important and urgent thing was that even students that did not have any affiliation with gang organizations also did not do well in school. The researcher thought one of the best ways to help these Hmong American high school students was to help them find themselves. Once he was hired, he initiated and worked with other Hmong teachers in the district and developed a pilot elective Hmong literacy course of study and then taught in the Hmong language classes. Eventually the Hmong language classes became institutionalized in the curriculum and adopted by the school board as meeting the “world language” requirement for graduation. After the program became more successful and other teachers were hired to teach the Hmong language classes, the researcher moved up again one more time to work as a student achievement specialist at the central office where he provided educational leadership and program technical skills to support both the central office, school site administrators, counselors, teachers, and parents.

While working as an English Language Learner program specialist in the central office, the researcher was asked to put a plan together for new Hmong refugees who had recently emigrated from Thailand. These arriving students represented the last major cohort of Hmong refugees from the remaining camps in Thailand that had been established at the end of the Vietnam War. After meetings with teachers, principals,
parents, community members, and local community based organizations for a few months, the researcher was part of a team which developed a proposal for a newcomer student center and presented it to the school board; however, the board did not adopt the proposal.

Newcomer Hmong students and teachers who worked with this new student population were essentially left alone to try to understand each other, the landscape, and their respective challenges. Some newcomer students at the high school level at least had access to the Hmong language classes at BB High School and that was one of the reasons that BB High School attracted many Hmong American high school students. The researcher was no longer directly involved in the class; however, the researcher maintained a connection with the students and teachers and the community from which the students came.

Thus, the researcher had a continuing interest in studying the multiple impacts of the Hmong world language class, both for Hmong American students who had resided in the United States for a significant period of time, and for the newcomer Hmong students. That continuing interest has remained a motivating force behind this research. The experience of the newcomer Hmong students from Thailand and their initial integration into an American school also became, by necessity, one of the issues addressed by the present research into the impact of the Hmong World Language class.

Based on the researcher’s background and professional experience, it is apparent that the researcher is both a participant in the communities he is studying (the Hmong
American community and the public school educator community) and, at the same time, an “outsider” in that he is conducting academic research that involves both of these communities. This insider/outsider role has advantages in that the researcher has a degree of familiarity with the communities he is studying, including their language, social and cultural norms and the like. This insider status also allows a certain level of access and entré for the researcher. At the same time, the researcher and his subjects must always remember that the researcher is also speaking to an “outsider” audience in his analyses and writing. This can create an internal conflict for the researcher and for the subjects. It requires honesty on the part of the researcher in acknowledging his two statuses in relation to his subjects, and an ethical sensitivity in regard to the trust which the researcher’s insider positionality may generate.

Reliability and Validity of Situated Research

In statistics, reliability is the extent to which an experiment, test, or any measuring procedure yields the same result on repeated trials. Reliability does not mean validity. Without the ability to use research tools and procedures that yield consistent measurements, researchers would be unable to satisfactorily draw conclusions, formulate theories, or make claims about the generalizability of their research (Howell et al., 2005). The research methods used in this study are considered reliable for these reasons. First, the data and statistical analysis of the young Hmong American recent high school graduates’ academic achievement using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
(SPSS) computer software program are appropriate for the data obtained from the school district. This method allowed the researcher to continue to use the student achievement data and produce relevant statistical outputs or results from that data. Second, the focus group’s interview using “thick description of cross cultural intersections” is one of the best approaches to conduct reliable research regarding a multilayered experience: it unearthed multiple layers of meaning and social significance through social interaction of young Hmong American high school recent graduates (Geertz, 1973).

According to Howell et al. (2005), validity refers to the degree to which a study accurately reflects or assesses the specific concept that the researcher is attempting to measure. There are two types of validity that researchers should know and understand: external and internal validity. External validity refers to the extent to which the results of a study are generalizable or transferable, and internal validity refers to the rigor with which the study was conducted (e.g., the study's design, the care taken to conduct measurements, and decisions concerning what was and was not measured) (Howell et al., 2005). Furthermore, internal validity also refers to the extent to which the designers of a study have taken into account alternative explanations for any causal relationships they explore.

The quantitative data in this study may in fact, standing alone, have certain limitations as a valid measure of student success. The data analysis examines academic outcomes according to standardized measures observed at one point in time. Therefore, it does not reflect the longitudinal impact of the Hmong language class, or the non-
quantifiable impact of the program. Nonetheless, these objective measures represent
societally recognized signifiers of student success and are relevant to the future academic,
career and personal prospects of the students involved. As part of a triangulated set of
measures, these quantitative outcomes contribute to the overall validity of the research.

The qualitative methods chosen by the researcher demonstrate a high degree of
validity in terms of their ability to draw from the participants their genuine perceptions
and experiences of the role of Hmong language instruction in the high school experience
of Hmong American students. This “face validity” is powerful in its own right. The
subjects are provided an opportunity to speak in their own voices about their own
observations and experiences as those are connected with the subject matter of the
research. The open-ended quality of the interview and focus group questions, and the
allowance of bilingual discourse in the interview and focus group process, increase the
validity of the data gathered from the subjects in these settings.

Furthermore, through the use of thick description, the voices, feelings, actions,
and meanings of interactions of these young Hmong Americans are heard (Denzin, 1989).
This use of thick description allows the researcher to build up a clear picture of the young
Hmong American recent graduates as individuals or groups in the context of their culture
and the setting in which they live (Holloway, 1997). Finally, there is a potential to
capture an authentic record of the “catalytic validity” created by the operation of the
HWL program (Lather, 1986). The researcher has observed throughout this research that
as part of a triangulated analysis of all data sources employed in this study, the data
generated by the interviewed participants had a positive, catalytic effect both in the
development of self-understanding among the participants, and in the generation of
insights which can now be applied to improve the educational experience of future
Hmong American students.

Data Collection

This section describes the procedures used to collect data for the quantitative and
qualitative analyses. It also includes information about an important aspect of the
qualitative data: transcription and translation of participants’ bilingual responses.

Collection of Quantitative Data

Once the research plan was submitted and approved by the school district, the
researcher worked with the district’s representative in order to retrieve the requested data
on Hmong American seniors from the district’s database. Since the goal of this study
was to find out about the impacts of participation in Hmong as World Language classes
on outcomes for Hmong American high school students, one of the first actions of the
researcher was to establish the following conditions and use them to perform a query or
to pull out information from the district’s Zangle student information system: 1) 12th
grade, 2) Hmong ethnicity, 3) Hmong language, 4) current school name, 5) student
number (permnum2), 6) birth place, 7) high school diploma status, 8) English proficiency
level, 9) took 2 years of Hmong language classes, 10) total high school GPA, 11) gender,
12) days present, 13) CST results in ELA for the school years of 08-09, 07-08, and 06-07,
and 14) CST results in Mathematics for the school years of 08-09, 2007-08, and 06-07. Using these search terms, data sets comprising a total of 190 Hmong American high school seniors were identified and created.

Once the quantitative data above were made available to the researcher by the school district, the researcher observed that not all the data sets were reliable or ready for the statistical analysis described in the instrumentation above. Individual student entries in the Zangle database were missing important student personal and academic performance information. Thus, in order to run statistical comparisons among the various entries in regard to the selected variables, this list had to be cleaned of incomplete records before the data sets with sufficient information could be used. Some student information such as the CST results in Math and/or ELA was missing for many students from 2006 to 2009. For some reason when these students transferred from other school districts in the state to this school district, their CST results did not follow them or never entered into this school district’s database. Finally, some other students had wrong codes entered for their English proficiency level or ethnicity in their electronic cumulative record. In order to have a reliable and clean set of data to work with, students for whom the information was inaccurate and/or incomplete were deleted from the list. In the end, 130 students were remaining and were accepted as a sample for this study. The data omissions appear to have been sufficiently random to convince the researcher that no pattern existed in data that had to be excluded which would affect the validity of the analysis of the remaining 130 data sets. The final data set was sufficiently robust to allow reliable analysis.
Before the student data in the Excel file could be exported to the SPSS program for analysis, all the information in the following nominal categories had to be converted to numbers or recoded: 1) birth place, 2) high school diploma status, 3) English proficiency level, 4) 2 years of Hmong language classes, 5) gender, and 6) CST results in ELA and Mathematics. Specially, the birthplace of the student was recoded and given a number of “1” or “2.” A “1” represented students that were born in the United States and “2” represented students that were born outside of the United States. For the high school diploma, “1” was assigned to students that did not graduate from high school and “2” for students that graduated from high school. For the category of taking two years of Hmong language classes in high school, “1” represented the students that did not take or complete the two years of Hmong language classes and “2” represented the students who had at least two years of the Hmong language class. For gender, “1” was for males and “2” was for females. For the CST results in ELA and Mathematics, “1” was for Far Below Basic (FBB), “2” was for Below Basic (BB), “3” was for Basic (B), “4” was for Proficient (P), and “5” was for Advanced (A). Finally, for the English proficient levels, “1” represented Beginning (B), “2” represented Early Intermediate (EI), “3” represented Intermediate (I), “4” represented Early Advanced (EA), “5” represented Advanced (A), “6” represented Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEP), and “7” represented Initial Fluent English Proficient (IFEP). Since the total high school GPA and the number of days that the students were present in class already came in numbers, it did not need to be coded.
Finally, once all the complete datasets had been entered into SPSS, the researcher analyzed the student data for patterns of relationship among variables and, if existing, predictors of various student outcomes. The researcher computed bivariate Pearson’s correlations to determine if any two variables in this study were linearly related to each other.

In the end, the tables of correlations indicated the direction (positive or negative), strength and statistical significance of every possible correlation between the variables, which had been the subjects of the Zangle data search. The researcher concentrated on those correlations, which were found to exist between variables relevant to the research question and correlations which were either statistically significant (p≤.05) or statistically suggestive (p≥.05 and ≤.10). In addition, the researcher paid attention to the strength of the correlation. Based upon the strength and significance of various correlations and their relevance to the research question, the researcher determined whether any variables were predictive of certain of the dependent variables, using regression analysis. More specific details will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

**Collection of Qualitative Data**

The collection of the qualitative data involved two separate interview events with two different groups of participants: teachers and students. The first interview event was a direct interview conducted with two teachers who have been teaching the Hmong language courses at the high school for many years. They were the only two teachers that were certified and qualified to teach Hmong as World Language courses at the high
school level in northern California at the time. As an active member of the Hmong American community and the school community, the researcher was already familiar with the two teachers, who were very willing to participate in the research through an interview (see Appendix C for consent form). The interview with the two teachers took place in the fall of 2011 at an agreed location in the South Sacramento area. A tape recorder was used to record the dialogues, and it was later transcribed by the researcher for this study.

The second interview event was a focus group interview, which included eight young Hmong Americans who recently graduated from high school. This previously described group was a subset of the 130 young Hmong Americans who recently graduated from high school. Since the young Hmong Americans were no longer minors, they were able to provide their own informed consent to participate in the research (see appendix D) and the researcher contacted them directly through various social networks in the Hmong American community and community at large. During the months of October, November, and December of 2011, the researcher traveled to local Hmong community meetings and events, Consumness River College, Sacramento City College, and Sacramento State to meet with Hmong American high school students who had recently graduated from the local high school in Sacramento, California. The researcher met and confirmed meetings with a total of 27 young Hmong American students who indicated an initial willingness to be a part of the small focus group interviews. This large group had a good balance of both genders and those that were born inside or outside
of the United States. The researcher hoped to have a diverse group for the study. Contact information such as phone numbers and emails were exchanged. Once the interview location was secured, the researcher made contact again with all potential participants to do a final check to see how many people were still willing and able to participate with the project. During the weeks of December 26, 2011 and January 6, 2012, the researcher made phone calls and/or wrote emails to all the 27 young Hmong Americans who had indicated an initial willingness to participate in the focus group. In the end, however, their follow-through was more limited than the original expressions of enthusiasm. By the date and time set for the focus group interview experience, eight people who had initially expressed interest in the process confirmed their availability to participate in the small focus group interviews. There were five young women and three young men in this group. One young man and two young women were born in the United States, and two young men and three young women were born outside of the United States.

Two days before the meeting date, the researcher made phone calls to remind all the young Hmong Americans again about the upcoming meeting at Hmong Women Heritage Association in the south Sacramento area. On the day scheduled for the focus group, three young women from the original eight showed up on time. The researcher made phone calls again to the other five people. The two young men born in Thailand indicated that they could not make it to the focus group after all. The reasons given included participation in a Ua Neeb (Shaman ceremony) and lack of transportation. One
of the first three young Hmong women who had arrived on time offered to help recruit participants in the focused discussion. She called two other students who had taken the same Hmong language classes in high school and graduated from high school during the same year. Remarkably, these two new young women agreed to join the focus group interviews during the last minutes. While the group waited for the two new participants to arrive, one of the original male volunteers and two more of the original female volunteers showed up. By the time everyone got there, it was 1:30 in the afternoon, half an hour after the original starting time. The make-up of the group was now one man and seven women. Despite the somewhat ad hoc nature of this grouping, the former students were very comfortable with each other and with the subject matter of the focus group interview. Thus, the researcher found the focus group process to be productive.

Light refreshment and bottles of water were provided. Everyone was excited to be there because some of them already knew each other from high school. The researcher asked all the participants to sit around the table. The researcher reintroduced himself and allowed all the participants to introduce themselves as well. He then welcomed the young women and young man to the meeting. The researcher explained the purpose of the focus group and how the process would be conducted. In particular, the researcher explained to the participants that he wanted them to discuss with each other their experiences as Hmong American students in BB High School, to examine their experience in the Hmong World Language class, and the relationship of that participation to their overall experiences as students in BB High School. The researcher
explained that he was more interested in the group’s exchanges with each other and their shared discussions and recollections than in their “answers” to any questions he might pose. The researcher indicated that he would pose some generative questions (Freire, Carvalho, Freire, Azevedo, & Oliveira, 2009) to the group and then serve as note-taker while the group engaged in the focus group process. The researcher asked for a volunteer from the participants to help facilitate the focus group process and to read the research questions. The only man in the group volunteered to be the facilitator and the other participants accepted his offer to perform this role. Once the facilitator assumed his role in the conduct of the meeting, the researcher stepped aside and started writing participant responses on flip charts. The structure of this focus group interview allowed all participants to have deep discussions of their past high school experience with each other and to engage the researcher in their discussions to the extent that they chose. In essence, the researcher let go of the focus group process and trusted the group. The focus group process and the many levels of meaning, which arose from that process, is more fully discussed in Chapter 4.

The participant facilitator did a wonderful job by creating a low stress environment where no person felt pressured to have to respond or answer all the questions. Not everyone answered or responded to every question, but that was expected and it was a part of this structure. However, the group did cover all the issues in deep and meaningful discussions. The conversations from the focus group interview were tape-recorded and then were transcribed later by the researcher.
Once the transcription process was completed, the researcher followed a five-step process to complete the qualitative data analysis. The researcher applied coding strategies identified through various sources (Bopp & Bopp, 1985; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). First, in order to be able to fully identify all the possible themes from the focus group interviews, the researcher carefully read the entire transcription word-by-word, sentence-by-sentence, and/or paragraph-by-paragraph many times. Once a theme was identified, a theme and a theme number were created. Second, after all the themes were identified, the researcher went back to read the whole transcription again. The goal this time was to identify a word, sentence, and/or paragraph that belonged to a theme or themes. As a result, a theme number was written before each of the word, sentence, and/or paragraph. Third, major themes encompassing the more specific themes were identified and created by combining all the small themes. Fourth, the smaller or sub-themes were organized or put under each of the major themes. This process in many cases was duplicated; one or more subthemes may be included in a major theme. Finally, the last task was to organize all the identified statements from the interviews under each of the subthemes. The product of this data analysis is more fully discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

A Note on Bilingual Transcription and Translation

The researcher is a bilingual speaker and writer of Hmong and English. The teachers and students who participated in the interviews and focus group were also bilingual. In addition, many spoke a combined language which some have designated
“Hmonglish,” statements which employ words and grammars from both languages interchangeably in the same sentence. The researcher decided to present the statements of the participants as they spoke them, in whatever language or combination of languages they spoke. Then the research had to address the necessity of presenting these statements in a language which American readers of the study could understand.

At first the researcher sought to translate the “exact” words spoken in the Hmong language into the English language. However this strategy led to chopped sentences, which were hard to understand in either language and did not convey the meaning expressed by the speaker. Therefore the researcher determined that any quoted statement would be presented in exactly the language in which it had been spoken, and, when the speech act involved Hmong or Hmonglish, the researcher would follow with an English approximation rather than literal translation, that is, with an English phrase or sentence which conveyed the meaning expressed by the speaker, with as much literalness as was consistent with understandability.

Summary

This chapter began with a general literature review of quantitative and qualitative methods of study. The literature was then related to the specific goals and processes of the present study, thereby providing a rationale for a mixed method approach to data collection and analysis. The quantitative design examined the records of 130 Hmong students looking at the relationship between participation in the HWL class for two years,
and a series of variables including gender, demographic background, GPA, English proficiency, standardized test performance, among others. The qualitative design involved an extensive interview with two teachers of the HWL class, and a focus group with 8 recent graduates of BB High School who had taken the HWL class. All participant responses were transcribed and analyzed. The chapter concluded with a discussion of the researcher’s dual positionality as an insider and outsider, as well as a description of the procedures used to transcribe and represent the bilingual responses of the participants.
Chapter 4

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter begins with a description of the evolution of the study’s research questions. It is followed by a report of the results from the quantitative analysis and the qualitative analysis. Then, in order to show how results from the qualitative and quantitative data supported the findings of this study, the researcher synthesizes the results using the reformulated research questions as a framework.

Evolution of the Research Questions

The original focus of this study was intended to be on the impact of studying Hmong as World Language on Hmong American high school students’ academic outcomes. The beginning phase of data collection was mostly quantitative, including existing student achievement data from the Zangle database in the ABC School District. The original Research Question addressed only one main question:

Q1: Does the completion of the two years of Hmong language courses have any correlation with or impact upon various measures of student achievement such as students’ high school graduation, Grade Point Average (GPA), California Standardized Test results in English Language Arts (ELA) and Math, and school attendance?
To address this question the researcher obtained existing quantitative data from the ABC School District for Hmong American high school students who were seniors in the 2010 academic year. The researcher discovered in the course of research that immediate academic outcomes was only a small part of the effects to be investigated and could only be imperfectly assessed by the data obtained on student outcomes. Since the HWL classes were not available to students until they entered high school and thus, impact on such measures as CST were different from the potential impact of earlier exposure to bilingual education in Hmong and English. The data from the school district did not capture the toll of Hmong American students’ earlier decisions to drop out of school since the data provided was on high school seniors only. The seniors were the ones that made it. These limitations on the quantitative data will be more fully discussed later in the chapter.

In addition to the limits arising from the nature and the time frame of the quantitative data, additional questions arose for the researcher from: 1) the research process itself, and 2) the researcher’s involvement in two communities whose experiences intersected around the Hmong World Language class such as the Hmong American community in the area served by the school district and the educators in the school and district where the Hmong World Language class took place.

The data did not speak to those Hmong American high school students that were successful but had transferred out or those that failed and disappeared from the school district. Additionally, CAHSEE and the high school senior project were an important
part of the high school graduation requirements. However, information pertaining to how students performed on these measurements was also not included in the Zangle quantitative data from the school district. Finally, the CST results in ELA and mathematics said more about the kind and quality of education that the students had received before taking the Hmong World Language classes than it did about the impact of the HWL program itself. However, it was possible that some Hmong American high school students may not enroll in the HWL classes until their junior and senior year in high school, so the impacts on their CST score in ELA and mathematics would not be valid. Further, these objective measures did not capture the subjective experiences of the Hmong American students as they pursued their education through an American educational structure and as they finally had the opportunity to integrate some of their Hmong identity into their educational program. The researcher’s prior knowledge of developing the Hmong language courses, work experience teaching the Hmong language courses, and work experience managing student achievement programs in the district informed the researcher that the existing data the researcher obtained from the school district would not be sufficient to measure the impacts of the Hmong language courses. It would be more convincing and credible to hear directly from the Hmong American high school students who had participated in the Hmong language classes. In addition, it would also be more compelling to hear from the Hmong bilingual teachers who had taught the HWL courses for the past twelve and seven years respectively and to compare
and contrast the perceptions of these two groups who were engaged in different but related ways in the same enterprise.

Furthermore, by examining the existing data from the school district, the researcher noticed that a large number of Hmong newcomer students had participated in the HWL courses. Due to the fact many of these newcomer students had participated in little formal schooling in the refugee camp in Thailand before and their English proficiency levels and other core content area skills were far behind their grade levels in high school, it was obvious that their academic performance in CST, CAHSEE, or high school senior project would be very low. The researcher wanted to find out whether the default HWL courses had benefited any Thailand born high school students in any way.

In short, the researcher selected a mixed method research design as the best approach to address the shortcomings of a qualitative-only look at the data. A mixed method study accounted for the many student characteristics involved, the many kinds of consequences arising from the HWL courses of study, and the potential complex interactions of all these factors. Furthermore, the researcher set out to document the life stories of young Hmong Americans who had participated in the HWL classes, including their high school experience. The real life stories shared by students and teachers would provide important and valid research information for this study.

Some of the additional questions could be addressed through the quantitative data initially gathered to study the original research question, but some required a qualitative investigation and analysis.
Q2. What differences in demographic characteristics can be identified among
Hmong American students in this sample who chose to take two years of Hmong
world language in high school?
This question could be answered by a refocused analysis of the quantitative data.

Q3. Are these differences in demographic characteristics related to differences in
the impact of participation in the courses for the various students?
Examination of this question required both analysis of the quantitative data
provided by the school district and of qualitative data obtained directly from teachers and
former students involved directly in the Hmong World Language classes.

Q4. What have been some of the consequences, other than those reflected in the
quantitative academic measurements, for Hmong American students who
participated in two years of Hmong World Language classes? In particular, what
personal, social or cultural consequences are associated with two years of
participation in the Hmong World Language class?
Examination of this question required analysis of qualitative data obtained
directly through the teacher interviews and the focus group interaction of the former
students
Q5. What have been some of the long term (post-high school education, career, life satisfaction) consequences associated with two years of participation in the Hmong World Language class?

Once again, these consequences could not be discerned from the quantitative data obtained from the school district but required an evaluation of the students’ own experiences as obtained through the focus group. Through the research process, this study’s questions took the following form. They are strongly qualitatively oriented and are examined through this mixed method study:

Q1: Does the completion of the two years of Hmong language courses have any correlation with or impact upon various measures of student achievement such as students’ high school graduation, Grade Point Average (GPA), California Standardized Test results in English Language Arts (ELA) and Math, and school attendance?

Q2. What differences in demographic characteristics can be identified among Hmong American students in this sample who choose to take two years of Hmong world language in high school?
Q3. Are these differences in demographic characteristics related to differences in the impact of participation in the courses for the various students?

Q4. What have been some of the consequences other than those reflected in the quantitative academic measurements, including personal, social or cultural consequences, for Hmong American students who participated in two years of Hmong World Language classes?

Q5. What have been some of the long term (post-high school education, career, life satisfaction) consequences associated with two years of participation in the Hmong World Language class?

Analysis of the Quantitative Data

This sections reports on the results of the descriptive and analytical quantitative analyses.

*Descriptive Statistics*

The researcher created charts indicating the percentage of students in the sample set who had taken two years of Hmong language and the percentage had not. The researcher further distinguished within these two groups of students, what percentages were male or female and what percentages were born in the United States and what percentage were born in Thailand. A particularly insightful descriptive analysis
compared the differences between percentages of males and females born in Thailand in regard to involvement in the Hmong language class and differences between percentages of males and females born in the United States in regard to the Hmong language class. As will appear in the later analysis in this chapter and in the discussion in Chapter 5, there were notable differences in participation of males and females when comparing the students born in the United States and the students born in Thailand.

**Figure 1.** Percentages of All Students Born in Thailand and the United States Participating in Two Years Hmong World Language

Figure 1 above compares the percentage of US born and Thailand born students who did and did not complete a two-year course of study in Hmong World Language. The data indicated that 71% (92) of the students taking Hmong World Language were born in the US and 29% (38) were born in Thailand. The data also indicate that between the two groups, as divided by land of birth, the students born in Thailand with 45% (17)
were far more likely to participate in the Hmong World Language course of study than the students born in the United States, 26% (24). The reasons for this greater enrollment may have involved many factors. The qualitative data analysis will provide some insights into the role of the HWL program in the educational experience of Hmong students born in Thailand compared to that of their peers born in the United States. This is a significant differentiation, because without looking at the differences in participation by place of origin, the overall involvement of Hmong students in the HWL classes appeared fairly moderate 32% (41), but for the Thailand-born students, the picture was different.

**Figure 2.** Percentages of Hmong Students Who Took 2 Years of Hmong World Language

Figure 2 compared the male and female US and Thailand born Hmong students who took and did not take two years of Hmong World Language. It shows that the
highest percentile of all students who took the Hmong as World Language classes were the female students that were born in Thailand, 71% (12). On the other hand, the male students that were born in the Unites States ranked second with 29% (11) taking the Hmong as World Language classes. As a result, the highest number of students that did not take the Hmong language classes were equally represented by the female students 76% (41) born in the US and male students 76% (16) born in Thailand. A comparison of males and females indicated that 35% (25) of females took the two years of Hmong language courses and only 27% (16) of males took the Hmong language courses. In addition, the percentage of male and female students born in the United States who took or did not take Hmong World Language were fairly similar, whereas the percentage of female students born in Thailand who took the Hmong World Language classes, 71% (12), was greater than the percentage of male students born in Thailand who took the same course of study, 24% (5). Since there were more male Hmong students from Thailand in the total pool of subjects than female Hmong students, this “selection out” by the males tended to make the total involvement of Thailand-born Hmong students in the language classes seem moderate 45% (17), when, in fact, among the female students from Thailand, nearly three quarters of those who could take these classes did take them.

Analytical Statistics

The analyses of the quantitative datasets for this study were conducted through the use of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). SPSS has been one of the most widely used programs for statistical analysis in social science. The statistics in
the base software included descriptive statistics, bivariate statistics, prediction for numerical outcomes, and prediction for identifying groups. In order to answer the research Questions 1, 2, and 3 above, the researcher conducted bivariate statistical analyses. In particular, the researcher determined that the computation of Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient was the most useful tool for analyzing the Zangle data from the school district. As will be discussed further, since the relationships that could be determined were based on a short period of Hmong language intervention occurring late in the students’ public school careers, the outcomes did not lend themselves to predictive statistical tools such as regression, ANOVA, or t-testing. The researcher analyzed the student data for patterns of relationship among variables and computed bivariate Pearson’s correlations to determine if any two variables in the study were linearly related to each other.

The tables of correlations indicated the direction (positive or negative), strength and statistical significance of every possible correlation between the variables, which were targeted by Zangle data search. For the purposes of this study, the researcher concentrated on those correlations which were found to exist between variables relevant to the research question and correlations which were either statistically significant (p≤.05) or statistically suggestive (p≤.10 and p≥.05). In addition, the researcher paid attention to the strength of the correlations (see Table 6). Based upon the strength and significance of various correlations and their relevance to the research question, the
researcher determined whether any variables were predictive of certain of the dependent variables using regression analysis.

Table 6

*Strength*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Value of the Correlation Co-Efficient</th>
<th>Strength of the Correlation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Perfect</td>
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<tr>
<td>0.8 - 0.9</td>
<td>Very Strong</td>
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<tr>
<td>0.5 – 0.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>0.3 – 0.5</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
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<td>0.1 – 0.3</td>
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*Interpretation of direction of Correlations:*

*Positive correlation - as one variable increases, the other variable increases*

*Negative correlation - as one variable increases, the other variable decrease*

As indicated in Table 7, there are two significant findings relative to research Questions 1, 2, and 3. The most significant finding was that, after taking the HWL classes for two years or more, students tended to have a higher GPA than those Hmong students who did not take two years of HWL \( (r = .235; p = .007) \). A second significant finding was that there was a positive correlation between being female and having a higher GPA \( (r = .231; p = .008) \). As is discussed below, this correlation between participation in the HWL program and GPA appears to have overcome the more predictable association between ELL status and low GPA.

Participation in the HWL classes was not associated with a higher CST ELA and CST Math score; however, this outcome is not really surprising. After all, the students did not take HWL until high school, sometimes not until their sophomore or junior year
and they may have been taking the second year of HWL in their senior year. Thus, the preconditions for the HWL courses to show a positive association with the tested ELA scores were not met. Furthermore, bilingual immersion or developmental bilingual education would probably have had to begin sooner and continue longer to create a measurable impact on CST scores.

Table 7

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<th>Correlations</th>
<th>Birth Place</th>
<th>HS Diploma (Y/N)</th>
<th>English Prof</th>
<th>2 YR of Hmong Language</th>
<th>HS Total GPA</th>
<th>gender</th>
<th>Day Pres</th>
<th>CST 0809 ELA Prof</th>
<th>CST 0809 Math Prof</th>
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<td>.947</td>
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**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
Despite the fact that the CST ELA score was not positively correlated with taking HWL, the HWL students did achieve an overall higher GPA than the students who did not take HWL classes. Thus, there was a statistically significant connection between taking the classes and an overall more positive school outcome.

It is worth noting that the absence of participation in the HWL class and birth in Thailand was negatively correlated with English language proficiency and CST scores. At the same time, English proficiency and CST scores were positively correlated with higher cumulative high school GPA. Thus, Hmong students born in Thailand overall might be expected to suffer from lower high school GPAs. However, Hmong students, wherever born, who took the HWL class, showed a positive correlation between the HWL class and their High School GPA. This suggests that the HWL class helped protect these students in some way from the negative outcomes more typically associated with their struggles with English language proficiency. The possible reasons for this correlation emerged from the analysis of the qualitative effects on the students taking part in the class, and will be discussed in the next section.

For all students, the positive correlation between taking the HWL classes for two years and GPA was stronger than the positive correlation between English proficiency and GPA. Indeed, the correlation table above shows that overall English language proficiency is positively correlated with GPA and having been born in Thailand is negatively correlated with English language proficiency. For that matter, there is a suggestive but not statistically significant negative correlation between taking two years
of HWL and English language proficiency. These findings would typically lead one to suspect that the Hmong students in the HWL class (a class which more students born in Thailand took) would have lower GPAs than the Hmong students who did not. Instead, however, the opposite result is shown. The positive correlation between two years of HWL and GPA occurred in spite of the English language proficiency challenges faced by these students. This suggests that participation in the HWL class “made up” for lower English proficiency in term of GPA. It appears to have functioned like an “equity” boost in terms of GPA for those who have a lower level of English proficiency.

There is no significant correlation among the Hmong students generally between English proficiency and GPA, but when the students who had less English proficiency participated in the HWL classes, there was a positive relationship between their participation and GPA. There was a negative correlation between English proficiency and taking the HWL classes for two years and a positive correlation between places of birth in Thailand and taking the HWL classes. The researcher looked for other evidence of this relationship in the qualitative data provided by the HWL teachers and the former students.

Analysis of the Qualitative Data

The use of dual languages in this study has already been discussed in Chapter 3. In this chapter, the reader should note that when a participant has spoken in Hmong or Hmong and English in the same utterance, the researcher has used standard type for the
Hmong statements and italicized type for the English statements and English translation.

In some cases, when an utterance involved only one or two English words in an essentially Hmong statement, the researcher kept the entire utterance in standard type and italicized the translation of the whole meaning for the sake of ease of understanding by the reader. These choices are the researcher’s only and have been made for the sake of clarity, not for any linguistic analysis.

Analysis of the Teacher Interview

The following were interview questions for the Hmong World Language teachers on Hmong American high school students’ experiences.

1. How long have you been a teacher?
2. How long have you worked at this high school?
3. What classes have you taught in your career as a teacher?
4. What classes do you teach today?
5. How long have you taught Hmong as a world language?
6. Have you seen any change in the demand for Hmong language classes since you began teaching Hmong? Explain.
7. If you have seen a change in the demand for Hmong language classes, what do you think are some of the reasons for this change?
8. What do you think are some of the most important issues facing Hmong American students today as they go through high school?
9. Describe the academic and social participation of Hmong American students in your Hmong language classes and in the high school generally.
10. Describe the effect that your Hmong world language classes have on the performance and adjustment of Hmong American students to their high school? Give examples of what you mean.
11. Describe the effect that your Hmong world language classes have on the adjustment of Hmong American students to their community and to the larger society? Give examples of what you mean.
12. What kind of support do you think a teacher working with Hmong American students should have in order for him/her to be successful at teaching these students?
13. If you could give three instructional strategies to teachers working with Hmong American students, what would they be?
14. Do you have any other comments?

The interview was conducted with both of the bilingual Hmong American high school teachers at the same time. They answered the interview questions both in the Hmong and English languages. The researcher used a tape recorder to record the interview, and it was later transcribed by the researcher. The transcription was later coded. As described in Chapter 3, the researcher spent a considerable amount of time reading through the transcription sentence by sentence and paragraph by paragraph many times and as a result, different themes or topics emerged from the discussions with the two teachers. Each of these themes or topics was given a number and that number was written next to each sentence or paragraph that included that theme. Sometimes a paragraph would include more than one theme, so the numbers of all the themes mentioned were written beside it.

After sifting through all the small themes or topics described above, the following five major themes emerged from the transcription of the teachers’ interview:

- Major Theme #1: Loss of Hmong language and cultural knowledge is hurtful to families and the Hmong American community and students themselves

- Major Theme #2: The impact of Hmong World Language Class on US-born Hmong students and Thailand-born Hmong Students – differences and similarities
• Major Theme #3: The long term impact of participation in Hmong World Language class on students as they move into adulthood

• Major Theme #4: Hmong World Language Class has positive impact on students’ relationships with family, community and self-identity

• Major Theme #5: Effects of the need for and the offering of Hmong World Language class on the school itself

These themes will now be explored through the words of the Hmong bilingual teachers that have been teaching the classes.

Major Theme #1: Loss of Hmong language and cultural knowledge is hurtful to families and the Hmong American community and students themselves. In the interview, one teacher pointed out that, growing up in the United States, Hmong American students have become less proficient in their home language, culture and roots. Many Hmong American high school students now questioned who they were and wanted to learn more about themselves.

Just the other day, one of the students and I were talking and he said, “I don’t know anything about myself. I want to know something about me as a Hmong teenager.” The demand is primarily because my guess is that a lot of students who do not speak, read, and write Hmong and they don’t know a lot about who they are, and many of them start to question about who they are.

Furthermore, one teacher pointed out that when Hmong American students do not know who they were, they tended not to perform well in school.
One of the problems that caused Hmong American high school students not to do well in school was due to the fact that they don’t know much about themselves.

The teachers continued to argue that language and cultural barriers of Hmong American high school students has contributed to the breakdown of family communication and relationships between Hmong parents and their children. As one teacher pointed out, the communication and relationship gap of the parents and their children has continued to grow, and it is a concern for the parents:

Another thing is that parents realize that they are losing; the gap between them and their children are growing so they are looking for ways to help themselves and to help their children learn Hmong because at home they cannot connect…(Some parents still approach their children from a traditional method like when they were still live in Thailand and/or Laos, but their children’s perception of life are more like today). They have challenges because they live in the same house but they have different thoughts.

The teachers contended that cultural identity crisis has been one of the challenges for some Hmong parents and students. One teacher pointed out that because Hmong American high school students could not connect with who they are and did not have the cultural values there are more challenges for them to survive in the academic world.

Students are disfranchised and do not connect with who they really are. In another word, they lack the confident and the cultural capital to see their values in who they are and how they are going to survive in the academic world.

One teacher reported that when he first encountered the Hmong American high school students in his Hmong as World Language class, they were very quiet and
mortified by their own self-identity. However, as they learned about their language, culture, and history, they then became to appreciate who they were.

*Only when they have self-esteem and confident and be proud of who they are, would they be in a good position to pursue their career and make something out of themselves, or become somebody. And I think these are some of the issues facing our students today: lose self-identity, lose the language and culture all of that, including the culture capital that needs to be built and what the language program does is to help students build culture capital and the language and culture confident, the self-esteem in order for them to become successful.*

Not knowing who they are seems to have resulted in negative consequences for Hmong American high school students both at school and home. One teacher stated that some young Hmong parents even came to realize that because they were not proficient in the Hmong language and culture, they could now not properly teach their children.

*Tiam sis (But) at this point, a lot of the younger parents who were raised here, in their 30s and 40s, tam sim no lawv tig rov qab los pom hais tias thaum lawv tuaj lawv tsis siv zog los khaws Hmoob cov txuj ci, keeb kwv, thiab cov ntaub ntawv ces tam sim no lawv qhia tsis tau rau lawv cov me nyuam ces (right now they realize that they didn’t learn how to read and write Hmong, and they didn’t know the Hmong history, and Hmong culture, so they cannot teach their children).*

In addition, the teachers found that adaptation to the new country and culture has been a challenge for Hmong American students and parents. Some parents and students still did not know about choosing a major in college or a career. One teacher asserted that it was important to help Hmong American high school students and their parents connect the needs of the Hmong American community to what young Hmong Americans study in school and to encourage them to come back to work in the community.

*One of the long-term issues that we want to work with is that all the Hmong parents want their kids to be doctors or lawyers. We are saying that that is wonderful, but at the same time in order to meet the needs of the community, we*
need to diversify our human resources. We also need leadership in the community. This opens the students’ eyes and gets them into thinking that, yes; we do need a lot of help in the community. This helps students to think about their role and the job that they will need. This helps them to be a more well-rounded person.

The teachers insisted that in order for Hmong American students to perform well in school and to become productive citizens of this country, adults who have the power and authority need to create positive learning environments and equal learning opportunities for the students. One teacher argued that when students see themselves as Hmong Americans and feel comfortable at school and in the community, they will succeed in school.

Students or that we are Hmong Americans. So that is a difficult concept for students until they feel that they belong, comfortable, or until they feel that authorities are not out there to get them, but they are there to help them and guide them, to become successful and become a contributing member of the society, these kids will excel in the academic world. So this is what I think will help Hmong students to be successful in the educational world.

Major Theme #2: The impact of Hmong World Language Class on American-born Hmong students and Thailand-born Hmong Students – differences and similarities.

The teachers noted a difference in the impact of the HWL class on Thailand-born Hmong American students than on US-born students.

Overall, the bilingual Hmong American high school teachers found that the Hmong as World Language classes provided equitable and culturally sensitive educational services for the most recently arrived Hmong newcomer students from Thailand. The classes helped the students to adapt to their new school environment and exposed them to the academic world. Based on one teacher’s observations, Hmong
newcomer students were able to make connections to other US-born Hmong American students in class. As a result, they were able to learn about the school and adapt to the academic culture faster. Moreover, at the same time, they were able to practice their English skills.

*I am not sure about students who were born in the US, but for the those that were born outside of the US, cov nyuam qhua tuaj nav (newcomers), I think in our class, these students seem to be able to socialize and understand the language and the gaps or barriers that they have. Actually, I believe that it facilitates them; it helps to bring them to par to the level much faster. Thaum lawv nyuam qhuav tuaj es lawv los kawm hauv kuv hoob no, ces lawv paub hais tias kev kawm ntawv nyob rau lub teb chaws no, thiab uas lawv nrog cov me nyuam Hmoob uas ib txwm yug los nyob rau teb chaws no tham ces learn much faster (When newcomers took my Hmong language classes and had the opportunity to connect with those that were born in this country, they learned about the school system and learning skills faster).

The adaptation to the mainstream culture in the United States for Hmong newcomer students has been challenging. The teachers reported that they were very quiet and shy in the classroom. The teachers had to coach them on how to be assertive in front of others and how to communicate their thoughts to others.

*In terms of social participation, tham ntej lawv kuj txaj muag (at first, they are very shy or quiet). Tiam sis peb qhia rau lawv kom lawv tsis txhob txaj muag thiab muab lawv xyaum hais lus (But we taught them not to be shy and they need to speak up). Peb qhia rau lawv hais tias yus yog yus ib haiv neeg lawm kom lawv tsis txhob txaj muag; yus yuav tsum zoo siab rau yus tus kheej (We taught them that as an ethnic, they should have pride and be proud of who they are). Lawv yuav tsum xyaum hais lus (They need to be more exertive and outspoken). With the activities in class, they become more socially active in class and more confident in themselves. Their self-esteem also increased and lawv xav ua dab tsi los lawv yeej ua tau (When they believe in themselves, they can do anything).

In contrast to the impact of the HWL class on Thailand-born Hmong students, the teachers reported that they felt the class had different effects upon US-born Hmong
students. In order to teach those young Hmong Americans that were born in the US about their parents and/or their grand parents’ way of life in the high mountains of Thailand or Laos, the teachers had to travel with their students back to Thailand to visit the Hmong villages in the mountains. The teachers argued that teaching should not only happen in the classroom, but outside of the classroom as well; especially when teaching Hmong American students about history and culture.

I also took a group of students to visit Thailand where their parents used to live, the Hmong life in the mountains. I believe that teaching is not limited to only in the classrooms.

The teachers affirmed that as a result of the Hmong as World Language classes having made some positive impacts with Hmong students at the high school level, more Hmong parents wanted their children to be proficient in the Hmong language and culture.

I think so because we have a lot of Hmong students that wanted to be in the Hmong class in the past and they couldn’t get into the class. And I know parents want to take their students to BB school because of the Hmong language class.

Teachers perceived that having hopes, self-respect, and self-esteem were important for the success of Hmong American high school students in school and life.

Over the years, I think I have seen a lot of students doing much better. They care more about who they are after taking the Hmong language class. When they care about themselves, ces lawv rau siab kawm me ntsis tuaj lawm (they work harder in school). They know who they are and they know their issues. Peb Hmoob kuj muaj keeb kwm zoo thiab (They learn that Hmong has a good history) and they start to care about who they are. Lawv paub txog lawv tus kheej ces lawv rau siab kawm ntawv tuaj lawm (When they know their roots, they want to study more in school).

Though the teachers observed differences between the Thailand- and US-born students in relation to the HWL class, they also found similarities. The teachers articulated that
culturally relevant and meaningful instruction they provided made a difference in their Hmong American students’ lives and their academic success. One teacher observed that when students first came to his class, they did not have much to say and were very quiet. But as he presented topics that were important and relevant such as Hmong history, Hmong culture, or other burning issues that had just occurred in the Hmong American community to his Hmong students, they were very interested. He believed that a discussion of relevant topics opened many of his students’ eyes and as a result, they wanted to work harder in school.

The teachers reported that one of the best ways to work with Hmong American high school students in school was by not only teaching the academic content area such as the Hmong language, but also teaching students important academic-related life skills that they need to know. An example of teaching these skills was helping students to think about what they wanted to do in their lives and then taking field trips to explore colleges and universities.

*In our class, students just not learn the language, but we want to make sure that students survive academically and know what they want to do in their career. The class also takes field trips to universities. We call this, “shadow night.” Our students will have opportunity to shadow Hmong College students at the university to experience of what it are like and what kind of classes they take. What kind of social life they have? And pick on the minds of the college students. I have personally taken some students to UC Santa Cruz and UC Davis to experiment life at the university and associate with college students. Our class is set up that former students can come back to do leadership training, to do academic awareness, to do enrichment activities with high school students that they usually don’t get in regular high school classrooms. For example, students from Sacramento City College will come to do one day training on leadership and academic life at the college. The Hmong students union from Sacramento State comes to our classes regularly to talk to students about school work. We also*
build a bridge between our former students now college students and our current high school students.

Again, the teachers contended that the positive impacts of the Hmong language classes on Hmong American high school students’ academic, social, emotional, and psychological being were big. The impacts were not just happening in the classroom but throughout the school campus and for all students. One teacher proudly asserted that more and more Hmong American students wore the traditional Hmong dresses and joined the Hmong New Year Celebration year after year. This not only brought a lot of pride to Hmong American students, but the students also had opportunities to learn about issues in their community.

Since Teacher V and I started teaching Hmong classes, we developed certain activities like thaum peb pov pob, thaum peb noj peb caug es peb pov pob (tossing balls during the Hmong New Year Celebration). Each year, we continue to have more Hmong American students involved. They have less shame of who they are and they have no problem wearing the traditional Hmong clothes and acting like a Hmong person. And also, a couple of other things that we notice are that these students would not hesitate to talk about. The classes that we offer in the program give the students the chances to celebrate who they are. For example, we have the New Year celebration and also provide the forum for them to discuss issues and concerns and experiences that they have at home and school. A lot of time, we spend a day or a period discussing questions that students have and for the most part, socially, it gives students the opportunity to talk and to mingle with each other, plan activities and celebration with their own peers with other Hmong students. In a sense, those are some of the academic and social aspects of being a Hmong student and what they did at the high school level, especially, within our language program.

The two Hmong bilingual teachers indicated that prior to the full implementation of the Hmong World Language courses, there were no Hmong Valedictorians. After the implementation of the Hmong World Language courses for Hmong American highs
school students, Hmong American high school students have continued to make academic progress and eventually some students became valedictorians.

I keep some of the data. Before I teach Hmong, we have zero of Hmong Valedictorian, but a few years after that we continue to have a lot of Hmong valedictorians. I don’t know, if it is because of the Hmong class, but I am happy to see it changes like that. The Hmong language classes yeej pab tau lawv kom lawv kawm tau zoo li ntawv (have made positive impacts with Hmong students academically). I compare my Hmong seniors, and general population. The Hmong seniors that took my class, about 95% of the students go to college. Compare to the regular students, only about 60% of them go to college. This is base on my observations.

Major Theme #3: The long term impact of participation in Hmong World Language class on students as they move into adulthood. The teachers reported that the US-born Hmong American children were losing touch with their community and as a result of the Hmong language classes, they now wanted to learn more about themselves. The more they learned about themselves, the more they had pride in their language, culture, and history.

I think the second and third generation Hmong American children in the US come to realize in terms of their identity and a lot of them have been losing touch with their community in terms of who they are and come to realize that, “May be we need something about our culture and ourselves”. … I think that opens the eyes for a lot of the students. And they say, hey, you know what...We should be proud of ourselves.

Another cultural change that took place in the Hmong as World Language classroom was regarding the gender roles in the new Hmong American community. The teachers asserted that they had to teach next generation young Hmong Americans about the new male and female roles in the mainstream society because from the traditional
culture, males tended to be dominant. The teachers contended that they were not only teachers, but they also were the cultural mediators.

*In our class, we encourage students to work together and to respect each other. In the Hmong culture, male has been the dominant one. We have tried to teach how the guys should work with the girls. We have tried ways to teach and break away from the tradition. We teach students how to cooperate in class regardless of their gender. And also to close the gap between the students that were born in the US and those that were born in Thailand.*

The teachers pointed out that since most Hmong high school students were already proficient in the oral language, learning how to read and write Hmong was a great idea and it would enable students to earn credits and finish high school faster.

It is a beauty to learn your own language in addition to meeting college requirements. And that is a plus. A lot of my students say that, “Why would I learn French or Spanish when I can learn the Hmong language and know who I am better? I also earn credits”

Once young Hmong American high school students learned about their culture, history, and language, they were ready to reconnect with their family and community, the teachers argued. Indeed, the positive news was that once these young Hmong Americans were whole again, they worked harder in school and believed in themselves more.

*So learning Hmong in high school like that is great for them because they can actually learn Hmong and also know who they are so they can connect with family at home… Lawv paub txog lawv tus kheej ces lawv rau siab kawm ntawv tuaj lawm (When they know their roots, they want to study more in school).*

Finally, once young Hmong Americans had confidence in themselves and were successful in school, they came back to the community. The teachers pointed out that they saw many young Hmong Americans return, and they have been giving back to the Hmong community already.
When students have the language, they feel more confidence. They can also get job. Yav Pem Suab Academy just hired two of our former students as teachers. Lawv xav kom Hmoob muaj identity, ciaj sia, loj hlob tuaj (These former students came back to teach because they want to give back to the community and they want to see more students successful in school and in life).

Major Theme #4: Hmong World Language Class has positive impact on students’ relationships with family, community and self-identity. The teachers reported that many Hmong American parents and students had a hard time believing that the United States is their new home country. Having faced racial discrimination, life had not been easy for them here. One of the roles of the Hmong language class is to have meaningful conversations about real issues that happened in the Hmong community and community at large and to teach students how to work with the community on these problems. One teacher argued that the goal was to help students become better citizens and ultimately become contributing members to society.

Whenever there is news in the community, we talk about it. In America, the Hmong never have it easy. They face discrimination. They need to be able to work with the society at large, to reduce the biases that we have of other culture and be able to tolerate cultural differences. One of the main issues that I talk about in class is that Hmong parents have never really thought that America is really their new country. Some of the class activities that we do are to show that America is their homeland. They need to expect and accept America as their homeland; to love their country and to share with other people and other ethnicity and neighbors. We hope for them to become better citizens and become contributing member of the society.

Furthermore, the teachers asserted that the Hmong language classes have provided hands-on learning opportunities for young Hmong Americans to learn about real and important issues pertaining to students in the community where they lived.
Raising the issues and having students involved with the process, was one of the best ways to teach history to get these young men and women involved with the community.

_In the Sacramento, Hmong is a small population. But when we had the political rally, the vast majority of the students participated with the rally were students from our school. We worked behind the scene to help students. We were not there physically, but we talked about it in class. We raised the issues. We did not tell them to go, but we covered the legal process. We talked about Hmong leaders and especially the important of General Vang Pao and his contributions. And the students wanted to go and came back and reported to us. The kids were more aware of real issues in the society and they wanted to get more involved and active. Through the language program, that is how students become more aware of these issues._

Again, the teachers viewed that one of the best ways to teach young Hmong Americans about their identity and to involve them with real issues that related to their families and their community was to cover it in class as a part of the regular curriculum.

_We have covered a lot of the cultural identity and highlighted a lot of the political issues that are happening in the community and that helps students to get more involve with community volunteer work. In the Hmong leadership class, we encourage students to take leadership roles in school and also the community._

Major Theme #5: Effects of the need for and the offering of Hmong World Language class on the school itself. The two Hmong language teachers observed that the Hmong language classes have had positive impacts on schools in the areas of school leadership, management, and environmental consciousness. One teacher stated that when he first started to work at BB High School there were a lot of fights involving Hmong American high school students on a regular basis. However, as the teachers and Hmong students continued to have dialogues in class and learned about the challenges of Hmong American students, the gang and student fighting issues on the school campus died down.
The teachers pointed out that the offering and maintaining of the Hmong as World Language courses was not easy. If the courses were not effective for the school, school administrators would not support having the classes because of political pressures.

School administrators supported and continued to expand the Hmong language courses because it had increased school attendance, eliminated gang activity on the school campus, and ultimately increased student academic performance.

_I think the Hmong classes help a lot of ways to bring students to high performance. First, tsev kawm ntawv lawv yeej pom thiab es lawv thiaj li (the school administrators know that the Hmong language classes have made positive impacts with the students and school that is why they) support it very much. If not they would not support it. And the Principal understands that because the Hmong language classes were very effective. One, it has increased the school attendance. Two, it has eliminate gang activity on the school campus. Nws tsis muaj sib ntaus tuaj lawm thiab tsis muaj cov me nyuam ua laib zuj zus lawm. I can tell you that when I first worked there, there was a fight almost every day. Tom qab no, (Later on) fighting was reducing and reducing and was getting better and better. Maybe there are other factors too, but I truly believe that the Hmong classes have been one of the factors that affect these changes too because of the culture and student prides we teach in class. Qhov no yog ib qho uas pab tau rau lawv kom lawv dhau tau mus ua ib co neeg zoo (This has been one of the good things that enable many unmotivated and disenfranchised students to turn into good students). Ntxiv mus, Hmong class kuj ua rau lawv kom lawv rau siab kawm ntawv tuaj thiab ua neeg zoo (In addition, the Hmong class has helped students to study harder in school and become a good person or citizen). School sees that and they support the Hmong class very much. I have been approached by the Principal a few times and he told me, “Good job. Good Job.” _I think that is a good thing. I think the Hmong class is very political in our school._

One teacher indicated that he did not teach students only how to read and write, but he also taught and showed students how to overcome their own challenges and helped them to become better students. He contended that once students understood and got the meaning of what they were learning, they were very well behaved. For example, he
argued that he did not have to write any citations at all due to good student behaviors.

Finally, the teacher reported that the positive impact on the students in his class also positively impacted other classes.

_We also cover street gang issues. We show them that we are the same Hmong people and we should work together. We have many things that are similar and that helps students to understand. As a result, students do get along much better....In the last four or five years, I have not written a single referral for students. I did not have any behavior issues or students not performing issues in class. About 95% of my students are Hmong students. In terms of adjustments and performances, students have learned to work together and cooperating with each other and not fighting among each other. There are a lot of rooms and times that they can spend on learning. Not only in the Hmong classes, but this has an influence on other classes._

The teachers reported that the Hmong language classes played a very important educational role in providing a multicultural education for students and school staff. The sponsorship of the Hmong New Year Celebration by the Hmong language classes was very innovative and successful in celebrating diversity. Furthermore, the celebration of the Hmong New Year on the school campus also brought Hmong pride to Hmong American high school students. One teacher observed that more and more students were involved with the activity each year. This was an indicator that many of these lost second and third generations of Hmong American students were connecting back to their own roots and community.

_Since Teacher V and I started teaching Hmong classes, we have developed certain activities like thaum peb pov pob, thaum peb noj peb caug es peb pov pob (tossing balls during the Hmong New Year Celebration). Each year, we continue to have more Hmong American students involved. They have less shame of who they are and they have no problem wearing the traditional Hmong clothes and acting like a Hmong person. The classes that we offer in the program give the students the chances to celebrate who they are. For example, we have the New_
Year celebration and also provide the forum for them to discuss issues and concerns and experiences that they have at home and school. In a sense, those are some of the academic and social aspects of being a Hmong student and what they did at the high school level, especially, within our language program.

The teachers asserted that the Hmong language classes have provided many unique benefits for Hmong American high school students. The benefits included having the ability to communicate with family at home, getting credits for high school general education requirements and receiving credits for the college A to G requirements.

So learning Hmong in high school like that is great for them because they can actually learn Hmong and also know who they are so they can connect with family at home…Students have started to see that the Hmong language class is important. The Hmong language class meets the A to G requirements at the high school and General Education requirements at the university level. At least these are some of the benefits that students see.

The teachers agreed that Hmong American high school students have made a lot of progress.

The bilingual Hmong World Language teachers proudly reported that based on their many years of observations, Hmong American high school students at BB High School have made tremendous academic progress. Prior to the full implementation of the Hmong World Language courses, there were no Hmong Valedictorians. However, this changed after the offering of the Hmong World Language courses for Hmong American high school at BB High School. One teacher argued that indeed most of his former students had gone to college after graduating from high school.

Finally, the Hmong bilingual teachers suggested that since the Hmong as World Language classes had made tremendous positive impacts on Hmong American high
school students at BB High School, these courses should be beneficial for others as well.

Indeed, they recommended that these courses should be available for students at other appropriate high school campuses.

Hmong classes should be offered for Hmong students at other high school campus as needed where there is a large number of Hmong student enrollments. This will help students to develop their home language and explore more about who they are so they would not be disenfranchised.

**Analysis of the Focus Group of Former Students**

The following were interview questions used in the focus group of recent high school graduates who had taken two years of HWL.

1. When did you graduate from high school?
2. Describe your four years of high school experience.
   For Example:
   a. What did you like best about high school?
   b. What did you like least about high school?
   c. What were your strengths as student in high school?
   d. What was the biggest challenge to you in high school?
3. What were some of the things that helped you to overcome academic barriers in high school?
   For example:
   a. Who were the people you would go to for help in your high school?
   b. Outside your high school?
4. If you had trouble understanding the content in a class in high school, what did you do?
   a. Did you ask for help? From whom?
   b. If you asked for help, were you given any help?
5. Was there a teacher who really helped you in your learning? What did that teacher do that made her or him such a good teacher?
6. What do you think your high school could have done better to help Hmong American high school students achieve success?
7. If you could have made one change about your high school, what would that change have been?
8. What strength did you receive from your family and your culture to help you as student when you were in high school?
9. What problems do you think Hmong American students still experience at your old school or in school generally?

10. You took the Hmong as World Language class. What levels, Level 1, 2, 3, or 4 classes, did you take?
   a. What was the best part of your Hmong language class?
   b. What would you change about the class?
   c. Did the class help you with anything at home or in the Hmong community? If yes, tell us a way that it helped you at home or in the Hmong community.
   d. Did the class help you with anything at school? If yes, tell us a way that it helped you at school.
   e. Before taking the class, how would you have rated your feelings about the Hmong language and culture? Positive, Neutral, or Negative?
   f. After taking the class, did your feelings change towards the Hmong language and culture? If so, did they become more positive or more negative?
   g. Would you advise a friend or your brothers and sisters to take that class?

11. What are you doing today?

12. How do your family and your culture help you today as a young adult?

13. What do you think are your greatest strengths today?

14. What are your plans for:
   a. Your future education?
   b. Your career?
   c. Your role in the community?

15. If you could give three pieces of advice to high school teachers about how they could help Hmong American students learn best, what would they be?

16. Do you have any other comments regarding your experiences as a high school student or your experiences as a young adult Hmong-American?

It was 1:30 in the afternoon on a beautiful day. Finally, all eight young Hmong Americans had the chance to meet each other again after graduating from high school the year before. Everyone was excited to see each other again. Once all participants sat at the table and the researcher finished his short introduction and welcoming speech, the young Hmong Americans started to organize themselves. In essence, the researcher let go of the focus group process and trusted the group.
The only man in the group volunteered to be the facilitator and the other seven participants accepted his offer to perform this role. Once the facilitator assumed his role in the conduct of the meeting, the researcher stepped aside, assumed the role of notetaker and started writing participant responses on flip charts. The structure of this focus group interview allowed all participants to have deep discussions of their past high school experience with each other and to engage the researcher in their discussions at their initiation and to the extent that they chose. They created a very low stress environment where no one felt pressured to have to respond or answer all the questions. Not everyone answered or responded to every question, but that was expected and it was a part of this structure.

The focus group covered all the issues in deep and meaningful discussions. At some points, the participants were laughing with joy because they had faced many challenging situations but they prevailed over them. And there were moments where the young Hmong Americans were very emotional and were in tears because the decisions that were made by the authority or the adults at the school and district level impacted them very negatively. These experiences were very difficult for them and changed their lives. Also, there were moments where they comforted and cheered for each other. In the end, they were determined to share their high school experience with the world and they hoped that through this process other students like them would have a better high school experience. More importantly they were determined to stay connected and to work in the school so they could give back to their parents and community.
After spending a great deal of time reading the transcription sentence by sentence and paragraph by paragraph many times, the following seven major themes emerged:

- Major Theme #1: The Hmong American students’ experiences of alienation in the public school setting

- Major Theme #2: Loss of Hmong language and cultural knowledge is hurtful to families and the Hmong American community and students themselves

- Major Theme #3: The positive impact of Hmong World Language Class on American-born Hmong students and Thailand-born Hmong Students – differences and similarities

- Major Theme #4: The long term impact of participation in Hmong World Language class on students as they move into adulthood

- Major Theme #5: Hmong World Language class has positive impact on student’s relationships with family, community and self-identity

- Major Theme #6: Effects of the need for and the offering of Hmong World Language class on the school itself
Major Theme #7: Impact of teachers – the good, the bad and the ugly

These themes will now be explored through the words of the focus group participants.

Major Theme #1: The Hmong American students’ experiences of alienation in the public school setting. The results of this theme are divided into two main sections: experiences of Thailand-born students and US-born students. The results are further divided into what exacerbated the students’ negative experiences, and what helped them through the challenges.

Part A. The experiences of the last wave of Hmong refugee students from Thailand. The first wave of Hmong political refugees from the refugee camps in Thailand started to arrive in the United States in 1975. As refugees completed their migration to first world countries and the refugee camps became empty, all the camps were closed except one. Wat Thakabok Temple was considered the last refugee camp where thousands of Hmong political refugees resided for many years. Like other refugee children, not all children living in Wat Thakabok could go to school. Only a handful of Hmong refugee children could attend Thai school. In 2004, after 30 years of waiting, the last wave of Hmong refugees finally immigrated to the United States and Wat Thakabok was finally closed down.

Although most of the recently arrived Hmong refugee families were sponsored and/or adopted by local Hmong American churches, clans, or relatives, they still faced some challenges similar to earlier waves of Hmong refugees when they first arrived in this country. The most common challenges for the parents included having to: 1) learn
English, 2) learn how to drive, and 3) get a job so they could earn and have income for the family. Moreover, the challenge for Hmong newcomer students was to learn English and all the core content areas and to be able to adapt to the school and academic culture quickly so they could achieve at their grade levels.

The researcher was working as a school administrator in ABC School District at the time and had the opportunity to communicate with school teachers and observe many classrooms with newcomer students at the high school level. He found that most of the students had very little formal schooling in the refugee camp before entering the school district. Their academic skills were very low. A small number of them had to learn how to hold a pen or pencil as ninth graders while trying to learn the content skills at the same time. Many teachers and schools expressed concerns about such needs of the students and how teachers should approach them, but in the end, no district program was provided. All Hmong newcomer students in the district were left to “sink or swim” by themselves.

In the focus group conducted for this research, five of the participants were recent immigrants, born in the refugee camps of Thailand. In the focus group discussion, they reported what did not help them and what helped them from their high school experiences.

*What did not help them?* As the young Hmong Americans were sitting at the table, reflecting on their high school experience at BB High School and sharing with each other, there were moments where they were crying, sad, and very disappointed.
However, there also were moments where they were laughing with joy because their accomplishments were remarkable given that they just immigrated to the United States not too long ago. These recently graduated, former high school newcomer students reported that they could not do much about their problems in school. They had to comply with the decisions of the authorities. One former newcomer student argued that too many ESL classes were assigned to her at the beginning of her high school career. As a consequence, many of these courses did not meet the high school graduation requirements. In order to meet the minimum requirements for high school graduation as required by the school district, she had to overload her class schedule and took more classes to make up for the ones that she did not have.

Thaum kuv nyuam qhuav tuaj Thaib Teb tuaj nav, ces lawv muab kuv kawm cov ESL ntau dhau lawm, ces tau ob xyoos peb cov ESL tsis meet peb cov regular classes ces peb thiaj yuav kawm tiav high school (*When we just came from Thailand, they made me take a lot of ESL classes. The ESL classes that I took for two years did not meet the regular classes’ requirements*). Ces peb yuav tsum tau muab peb schedule kawm kom pack peb thiaj li yuav tau peb cov graduation requirements (*By then we had to overload our class schedule by taking additional classes that would meet the high school graduation requirements*).

Furthermore, the five former newcomer students regretted that the school also failed to fully prepare them for four-year colleges. A student expressed that she wanted to go to college and felt that she had the ability to go to a four-year college, but her high school failed to prepare her. The school assigned too many English SDAIE classes for her to take and those classes did not help her to get into the California State University or University of California systems. She worked hard in school and she had a high GPA,
but she did not have the necessary English courses for the four-year universities. As a result, the community college was the only school that accepted her.

Thiab ib qho tsis zoo rau kuv mas yog kuv tau kawm cov English SDAIE classes no ntau dhau hwv lawm ces, yog kuv xav mus kawm ntxiv rau pem UC los yog Sacramento State tej ntawv naj, ces kuv tsis muaj cov regular English ces lawv tsis accept peb (Another thing that was really bad for me was that I took too many English SDAIE courses. When I applied for the University of California and California State University, Sacramento, they did not accept me because I did not have enough regular classes in high school). Ces peb thiaj tau mus Sacramento City xwb vim peb tau kawm SDAIE classes xwb (As a result, I qualified to attend only Sacramento City college). Ces lawv hais tias peb tsis qualify mus kawm UC thiab Sacramento State (They told us that we did not qualify to go to the UC and Sacramento State). Peb cov GPA mas yeej qualify tiam sis peb cov English uas yog regular classes ntawv peb tsis tau take ces lawv tsis kam peb mus (Our GPA qualified, but the classes that we took in high school did not qualify us to go). Qhov no yog ib qho uas ua rau kuv tu siab heev (This was one of the very sad things for me). Qhov lawv ua li no rau peb, thaum cov college lawv tuaj nav, lub college uas yus xav pais ces lawv tsis kam txais yus hais tim tib qho ntawv xwb nav (When the colleges came to recruit students, this was the only reason we were rejected). Kuv yeej ntseeg tau kuv tus kheej hais tias yog kuv mus kawm kuv yeej ua tau li lawv ua thiab (I believe in myself that, if I had the opportunity to go to the UC and Sacramento State, I would do well like other students). Tiam sis mas ntawm yus school, lawv yeej muab peb faib li ntawv nav, ces ua rau kuv qhov opportunity tas lawm (Unfortunately, the way our school programmed our classes had really shattered my opportunity).

Two young Hmong American women sadly pointed out that in addition to the problems of having to take too many ELD and SDAIE classes, low teacher expectations and watered-down curriculum in the SDAIE classes were additional challenges they faced. They felt that this did not help to prepare them at all for the regular classes.

Thaum kuv ho mus kawm kiag hoob regular Chemistry no lawm ces kuv paub hais tias, “oh ua cas nyuaj ua luaj?” (I knew the different between SDAIE and the regular classes when I took the regular Chemistry class). Thaum kuv nyob rau hauv SDAIE, ua cas lawv qhia yooj yim tag npaum li ntawv rau kuv? (When I was in the SDAIE classes, the assignments were very easy). Ces kuv twb tsis prepare li (As a result, I did not really prepare for the challenge courses). Kuv
As the young Hmong Americans continued to reflect on their experience taking the SDAIE classes, the one thing they stressed the most was that the classes were not rigorous and challenging enough for them.

(When we just arrived in this country and our English skills were very limited, they scheduled many SDAIE classes for us to take). Ces lawv qhia txawv zog (In these classes, they taught us a differently). Cov hoob peb kawm yog SDAIE ces lawv yeej qhia yooj yim zog thiab zoo li peb tsis tshua muaj work ua (The SDAIE classes that I took, it was not that challenge and we also had less homework to do). Peb nyob ua si ntau dua xwb (We had a lot of free time in class). Thaum ntawv kuv feel li nws yooj yooj yim rau kuv; zoo li kuv mus pw xwb (During that time, I thought the classes were too easy for me; I felt like I just went to class to sleep).

In addition to their dissatisfaction with the quality of the ELD and SDAIE classes, the Hmong newcomer students said they also had to deal with inappropriate student placement. They asserted that they wasted a lot of time playing with mud and drawing.

One bright young Hmong woman articulated that since she was already so far behind her peers in grade level performance, the school should have allowed her to take more core classes in order for her to catch-up with her reading, writing, and mathematic skills. She could then have prepared herself for college accordingly instead of having to take all these ceramics and/or art classes.

(I think the school should work harder to prepare us for college). Kuv xav kom lawv prepare me ntsis (The school should not require us to take classes that did not help us). Lawv pheej muab peb mus ua tsev ua ntoo los yog mus puab av tej ntawv (For example, they made me take capentry (woodwork) or pottery
(ceramic) classes). Hais txog puab av tej ntawv peb nyob Thaib Teb peb twb kov kov av lawm (As a child growing up in Thailand, I spent a lot of time playing and working with mud and ceramics already) (LOL). Kuv tsis paub hais tias ua li cov me nyuam uas yug nyob teb chaws no seb lawv puas tau kov av xwb? (I don’t know about children that are growing up in this country, if they also have the chance to play with mud and/or ceramics?) Tiam sis peb cov uas yug nyob sab tim ub ces peb twb kov kov av thiab twb txawj txawj puab ub puab no los lawm (For many of us that were born in Thailand, we already knew how to work with mud and ceramics and that was enough). Cov teacher es peb tau kawm los no mas tseem muab peb coj mus puab ntxiv thiab coj mus teeb duab (The teachers I had required us to do ceramic work and to draw pictures)…Mus teeb duab li ntawv ces take a lot of my time ces kuv tsis muaj sij hawm mus npaj mus kawm rau cov hoob Math thiab English uas yuav npaj mus rau tom college (These classes took a lot of learning time away from me. I could have used this time to take Math and English classes, which would better prepared me for college).

While these former high school newcomer students spoke about bad experiences they had had in high school, they were clenching their hands and exhaling noisily. They argued that in addition to getting too many wrong classes and having some unqualified teachers, they also had to complete and pass other high school graduation requirements such as the high school senior project and the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE). One young woman explained that one of the most challenging tasks for her in high school was to pass the CAHSEE. She felt that this was not a fair requirement for her because she had only a few years of high school education in the US.

Qhov challenge nyob rau hauv high school rau kuv ces yog senior project thiab CAHSEE (The most challenging thing for me in high school was the CAHSEE). Kuv xav hais tias yog kuv tuaj yug loj hlob nyob lub teb chaws no ces tej zaum nws yeej yuav tsis nyuaj npaum li cas (If I were born in this country, it would not be that difficult for me). Tiam sis thaum peb nyob rau sab tim Thaib Teb ces ib tug ntawv Asmesliskas los yeej tsis tau kawm li (In Thailand, I never had a chance to learn English). Ces mam li tuaj pib kawm thaum yus twb loj loj hnub nyug muaj li 12 los yog 13 xyoos ntawv, yus twb tsis paub dab tsi li (I started to learn English when I was about 12 or 13 year old...this was very difficult for me).
What helped them? As they looked at each other at the table and reflected about the good things they could remember from BB High School, their faces turned bright and shining. The young Hmong Americans now affirmed that some of the most important people in their high school life were their teachers. Indeed, there were many caring and hardworking teachers who played some very important roles in educating them and helping them to attain high academic achievement. One young woman indicated that she was lucky to meet many teachers who were really good at what they were trained to do, to teach. She was amazed by how smart and how hard these teachers were working.

Thaum kuv kawm nyob rau high school, kuv yeej muaj ob peb tus teachers uas lawy yeej qhia ntawv tau zoo heev (When I was in high school, I had many teachers that were really good at teaching). Lawv yog (They were) English thiab (and) Math teachers. Muaj ob tug teachers uas lawy qhia tau English zoo heev rau peb cov tub nttxhais Hmoob kawm ntawv uas peb nyuam qhuav tuaj tim Thaib Teb tuaj ces lawv txawj qhia heev (There were two English teachers that really knew how to teach us; especially, those of us that just came from Thailand). Nws qhia peb nyeem ib phau book nav, mas nyeem tag ces nws muab qhov chapter peb nyeem ntawv teeb ua ib daim duab los yog ua ib daim picture (The teacher taught us how to read a book. After reading the book, the teacher took the main ideas from the chapters and drew pictures to demonstrate the story for us). Nws muab cov details hauv phau book peb nyeem ntawv ua kiag ib daim duab tawm (The small details in the story became a picture). Nws muab teeb kiag rau peb pom hais tias qhov chapter peb tau nyeem ntawv nws yog dab tsi thiab yog ua li cas hauv? (The teacher drew the picture of the details in the chapter and told us what it was all about). Txawm hais tias thaum peb nyeem ntawv peb tsis to taub qhov story ntawv los thaum peb saib daim duab ntawv ces peb twb paub lawm (Even we didn’t understand the story when we read it, when we saw the picture, we knew what the story was about). Thiab tom qab peb nyeem phau book ntawv tas lawm nws yeej questions los nug peb (After we read the story, the teacher usually asked us questions). Ces rov qab go over phau book, peb rov los read tom tsev dua thiab peb rov qab nrog peb tus phooj ywg tham es txog qhov chapter los yog phau book peb nyeem ntawv nav (During this time, we had to reread the book. This was another opportunity for us to do the work at home and to study with our friends).
One former high school newcomer student insisted that it was essential for newcomer students to have teachers who knew their linguistic and educational background well in order for the teacher to teach them effectively. For high school students, there was nothing like the exciting and great learning experience they had with their teachers who had the compassion and energy to work hard to teach their students. Even after graduating from high school years earlier, one young Hmong woman still remembered her English teacher’s teaching methods vividly.

Nws yeej paub hais tias peb nyuam qhuav tuaj tshiab peb tsis tau txawj sau ces nws muab lub caij nyoog ntau ntau rau peb sau (The teacher knew that we just immigrated from Thailand and our English was not that good, so the teacher gave us enough time to work on our lessons). Tsis yog muab sij hawm tsawg tsawg xwb, nws muab sij hawm ntau ntau rau peb xav es peb mam li sau peb daim essay (The time that the teacher allocated for us, not only for writing and reading, but also for thinking and brainstorming our ideas). Nws qhia tas thiab nws haj tseem muab caij nyoog ntev ntev thiab yog thaum yus muaj questions yus tsis to taub nav, ces nws yeej los nrog yus tham (After the teacher taught the lesson for the day and if I didn’t understand, the teacher would come and talked to me). Nws tsis yog los nrog peb ib pab tham, tiam sis nws los nrog yus tham one-on-one (During this time, we usually met with the teacher on a one-to-one basis). Nws teem appointment los nrog yus tham kiąg xwb (The teacher actually made an appointment for us to see her). Yus qhia hais tias, “Qhov no kuv tsis to taub.” (When I told her, “I do not understand this part”). No ces nws yeej ua tib zoo qhia rau yus (The teacher listen carefully and tried her very best to teach me). Kuv kuj tsis paub txog lwm tus tab sis raws li kuv pom mas peb cov classmates mas thaum peb kawm ob tus teachers no tas mas peb yeej nyeem tau ntawv thiab sau tau ntawv zoo tshaj tuaj lawm (I don’t know about other students, but for me, base on my observation, those of us that just came from Thailand knew how to read and write because this teacher).

The young Hmong Americans observed that, in addition to the compassion and great work of some teachers, the Hmong language class was an effective resource for Hmong newcomer students. The Hmong as World Language classes offered great social
networking and learning opportunities for newcomer students. Definitely, they were able to make connections with other English proficient students in the class and to learn about the school and academic culture. In the end, they excelled in school academically because of opportunities like these. One former high school newcomer student expressed her thoughts about how she learned to write poems and formal letters.

Thaum tsis tau los kawm hoob Hmong class nyob rau lub tsev kawm ntawv BB no mas kuv kuj tsis paub hais tias yuav sau paj huum no yuav sau li cas? *(I didn’t know how to write poems until I took the Hmong language classes).* Kuv kuj tsis tau paub sau paj huum thiab tsis tau paub sau mus xyuas phooj ywg *(I didn’t know how to write poems and formal letter to visit friends).* Ua ntej kuv yuav los kawm no kuv yeej paub ntawv Hmoob lawm thiab tiam sis kuv tsis tau paub txog cov steps uas yus yuav sau paj huum ntawv *(I knew how to write Hmong, but I didn’t know how to write poems before joining the Hmong language classes).* Yus yuav sau li cas thiaj yog ib zaj paj huum thiab yus yuav sau ntawv yus yuav sau li cas thiaj li yog ib tsab ntawv? *(How am I going to write a good poem? How am I going to write a good letter to visit friends?)* Yog kyu yuav sau ib daim ntawv mus xyuas kuv tus phooj ywg los yog kyu yuav sau phauj, kyu yuav sau li cas es thaum mus txog lawm lawm ngeam lawm thiab thiay li to taub? *(If I wanted to write a letter to visit my friends or my aunt, how do I write it so they would understand my thoughts and feelings?)* Thaum kyu los kawm nrog tus xib fwb Hmoob ntawv nws yeej txawj qhia kawg thiab *(I thought the Hmong language teacher did a very good job at teaching me).* Nws qhia sau paj huum thiab sau ntawv *(The teacher taught us how to write poems and formal letters).* Thaum sau paj huum, yuav tsum muab cov lus los sib dhos li no thaum sau tas nws thiay li yog thiab thiay li zoo *(For example, when you write a poem, it has to rhyme in order for it to sound good).* Hauv txoj paj huum yus yuav muab cov ntsiab lus dab tsi los hais nws thiay li muaj zog. *(In the poem, you have to be able to pick the right words in order for the poem to be powerful and great.)* Thaum sau ntaww mus xyuas kww tij neej tsa thiay pheoj ywg, yus yuav tsum txawj thiay paub sau thaum lawv ngeam yus daim ntaww lawv thiay hais tias, “tus me tub los me nthais no nws txawj sau ntaww kawg.” *(When writing a letter to visit friends or relatives, I have to be able to write effectively so when they read my letter they would say, “This son or daughter really knows how to write a good letter”).*

As these former Hmong as World Language students reflected about their high school experience in the class, they agreed that they had a great time and great memories.
there. One first generation student stated that the Hmong language class enabled her to learn about the research process, how to read English, translate English into Hmong, summarize from English to Hmong and present to the class.

Qhov uas kuv nyiam tshaj plaws mas thaum peb xib fwb kom peb mus nrhiav xov xwm Asmesliskas coj los nyeem ces ho muab coj los sau ua ntawv Hmoob *(The most exciting part for me was when our teacher assigned us to search for and select a current article in English and then translated this article into the Hmong language).* Peb yuav tsum tau sau hais tias qhov xov xwm no yog dab tsi *(We had to be able to translate it and summarize it into Hmong)*. Yog vim li cas nws ho tshwm sim? *(What was the news about?)* Qhov es muab cov xov xwm Asmesliskas no coj los txhais ua lus Hmoob es coj los nyeem rau hauv lub class mloog mas nws challenging heev rau kuv *(We had to present our finding and translation to the class and that was really challenging for me).* Qhov no ua rau yus mob siab kawm vim hais tias yus ntshai tsam yus ua tau tsis yog thiab tsis zoo *(I had to work hard because I was afraid that I might translate it incorrectly and didn’t do a good job).* Yog li ntawv yus thiaj siv siv zog ua yus qhov best kom txhais tau cov xov xwm no meej coj rau hauv yus lub class *(Therefore, I had to do my very best in order to interpret and translate the news accurately for my class).*

In the end, these former newcomer high school students contended that the Hmong language class helped them to improve their essay writing. One young Hmong woman indicated that the teacher motivated her to read more. As a result, her reading skills improved overtime.

Cov hoob Hmoob no yeej pab tau kuv nyob rau hauv kev kawm ntawv *(The Hmong language classes have impacted me significantly in my study).* … Hoob Hmoob no ua rau kuv nyiam nyeem ntawv zog tuaj rau qhov thaum peb mus kawm ces peb yeej tau nyeem ntawv Hmoob tas li *(I also enjoy more reading now because we read so much in the Hmong language classes).* Qhov no kuj ua rau kuv txawj nyeem ntawv zog tuaj *(This has also improved my reading skills a lot).*

**B. The experiences of the second and third generation Hmong American students.**

Although the second or third generation of Hmong American high school students were
born in this country and usually can speak English fluently with no accent or pronunciation problems, many of them and their families still face challenges in school just like other language minority students. Some of the problems they have encountered may not be because of their own deficiencies but because of the deficiencies of some of the trained adult professionals who had authority but who failed to have high expectations for all students, or who failed to learn the needs of their students and to make sound decisions to benefit them. As a result of their poor leadership and the decisions they made or failed to make, students had to bear the consequences. Indeed, many American-born Hmong students have continued to fall through the cracks in the current educational system. As a part of the focus group, three of these young Hmong Americans reported what did not help them and what helped them as they pursued their education in the public schools.

*What did not help them?* One of the most important pieces of information for Hmong American high school students and their parents to have when they entered the high school door was the high school graduation requirements. It may have been obvious and easy for other families to understand or know but for some families it was not. As the young Hmong Americans reflected on their high school experience and spoke with each other, some of them reported that they had to learn about the school district’s high school graduation requirements the hard way. One young woman stated that by the time she knew what courses she needed to take, she was already in her last two years of high school, and it was not easy for her to catch up. She suggested that it was critical for the
school to find the best ways to inform students and parents about the high school graduation requirements right away when they entered high school.

Knowing the high school graduation requirements and taking the appropriate courses to complete those requirements was an important part of thinking and planning for college. One young woman observed that making an effort to choose a major and a college while the students still attended high school was an important decision.

Like G said, high school is when you make your important decision. It is high school that they start talking about colleges. What do students want to work after high school? So high school is the time for you to make your decision.

The young Hmong Americans were disappointed and saddened when they described the failure of high school counselors to assess and monitor their academic progress and place them in the appropriate and/or required classes so that they could complete the high school graduation requirements and prepare for college accordingly. They asserted that the unhelpful actions and inactions of the counselors made it more challenging for them to complete their high school career. One student expressed her frustration about the inadequate work of the school counselors this way:

Ib txhia counselors ces lawv cia li hais tias “oh, koj qhov schedule fits rau qhov no ces koj kawm qhov no.” (Sometimes, the counselors just told me, “Oh, this
class fits your schedule, you take this class”). Lawv kom koj kawn tov kawn tov, tiam sis thaum yus yog senior ces cov counselors lawv mam li hais tias “oh, koj cov credits tsis txaus. Koj tshuav hoob no hoob no. (The counselors were the ones to tell us take this class or that class, but by the time I got into my senior year, they told me, “Oh, your credit is still not enough. You still need to take this class and that class”). Ces lawv muab cov hoob ntawv coj los add rau yus ces yus tau hoob ntawv kawg li (By then the counselors added many more classes to my class schedule and I had so many classes). Yus tseem tau nyob 7th period tej ntawv (So I had to take 7th period classes). Koj paub hai uis tia ib hnub ntawv mas yus kawn 8 hoob mas sab sab li vim yus yuav tau tuaj txiv startup heev naj (You know during that time I took 8 classes everyday and I was very tired because I had to go to school early every day).

Ineffective, disorganized, and uncaring teaching hurt, the students found. One young Hmong American woman discussed with the group an unpleasant experience that she had while at BB High School.

*I also had a senior project and AP English. Everybody was ahead of me*. Lawv twb started rau lawv qhov senior project, tiam sis kuv qhov class twb tiam tai start ces kuv tsis paub dab tsi (I came to the class late. The already started their senior project, but I had to start from scratch). I think beginning in May, the teacher just gave instructions. June 5th, we had to present. Presentation yuav tsum yog 10 minutes, tiam sis school twb yuav tas ces nws muab like 5 minutes rau each student to present (The presentation was plan for 10 minutes, but by then school was almost over, so the teacher gave us only 5 minutes to present). Nws nyuaj nyuaj nua yus muab yus cov slides convert rau es kom yus explain lawv kom lawv paub (It was very challenging for me to reduce the number of slides because it was difficult for me to explain and present to the class). Thauv tawv peb ua txog Hmoob, ces kuv ua txog Shaman, tus Txiv Neeb (My project was about a Hmong Shaman). Nws nyuaj heev rau kuv rau qhov kuv tseem yuav tau mus thaj duab thiab muab cov duab convert los ua slide show (It was challenging for me because I had to take pictures and then turn these pictures into slides). Vim tias nyuaj nyuaj ces kuv ua tsis tshauam tau koo tiam sis kuv kuj passed lawm (It was very difficult and I didn’t do a good job, but I passed it in the end).

*What helped them?* The former high school students agreed that quality teaching and instruction was one of the best things about high school education. As the young Hmong women were talking about the good times they had in high school, they were
laughing with each other. There were even times when they tried to trick the teachers, but the teachers were too smart and they could not do it. Below was how one young woman described her experience with one of her favorite teachers:

I had two English teachers. Nkawv yog (They were) English 11 thiab (and) English 12 teachers. I got them for two years. They wanted us to read a lot of stuff. Zoo li peb muaj 18 tus tib neeg xwb rau qhov cov no yog AP English (It looked like we had only 18 students in this AP English class). I just realize that the teacher helped us and supported us a lot. The night before, he gave us a reading assignment to take home. When we went back to school the next day, he asked us to write and summarize about what we have read. Koj nkees nkees koj tsis read koj cia li dag hais tias koj read lawm (Some of us were tired so we just lied that we read the assignment). Yus twb tsis read los yus mus txog hauv yus yeej hais tias yus read lawm (I did not read, but I just lied that I did). Tej zaum nws yeej paub rau qhov nws yeej tsis mus rau ntawm qhov assignment li ov (I think the teacher already knew so he didn’t move on to the assignment at all). He took time to talk about the chapter and explain everything in details. Ces nws mam rov qab los hais rau peb kom peb los mus analyze qhov chapter ntawv (After his thorough and in-depth explanation, he then asked us to reanalyze the chapter again). Thaum yus mus txog hauv es yus read nav, tej thaum yus mus read txog tej qhov very boring nav, yus read cov words tag los yus lub mind mas zoo li yeej out of the box tas li xwb nav ces yeej tsis understand li (Sometimes, the assignments that I read had very big words and were very boring to me. I felt like my mind was outside of the box and I didn’t understand at all). Ces nws xav kom peb understand ces nws rov qab read rau peb dua (The teacher wanted us to understand, so he had to reread the story again). Nws los fill peb thiab nws mam los summarize qhov chapter rau peb kom understand (He explained and summarized the chapter for us in order for us to understand). I think he was a really good teacher. He helped us out a lot.

The US-born young Hmong American man appreciated what he learned in his Hmong language classes. He found that there were different ways of approaching his studies, from the Hmong culture as well as the American culture and that this helped him to perform better in school.

The Hmong language classes in school helped me to look at things from a different perspective. Before taking this class, I always look at the American
ways of approaching my studies. What I learned from the Hmong class is to learn how to use my thoughts and words to formulate or solve a problem. In the American culture I think, is directly attacking the problem. In the Hmong culture there are different ways to go at it or to look at it. So it was one of the ways to help me out in all my other classes.

Major Theme #2: Loss of Hmong language and cultural knowledge is hurtful to families and the Hmong American community and students themselves. Sitting at the table, as the young Hmong Americans continue to dialogue about their challenges, Hmong American identity was one of the issues that stood out the most. When the Hmong people came to the United States, they could not return to Laos. They did not have a country to return to. The United States was their new country, but young Hmong Americans that were born here never had the chance to really learn about who they are in an academic setting. One young woman observed that when people of other races or ethnicities asked them about their ethnicity, they did not have the answer because they did not know who they were.

One of the things that is still going with Hmong American high school students is that sometimes they don’t want to be Hmong students. They don’t have enough confidence to be Hmong. A lot of people look at us and they don’t know us. They asked, “Are you Chinese?” I told them, “I am Hmong.” And they said, “What is Hmong?” And, “What is your country?” A lot of times, students don’t know how to answer that. Sometimes they are too Americanized or sometimes their parents do not talk too much about being Hmong. So in the end they don’t know who they are.

The recently graduated Hmong American high school graduates experienced this kind of alienation throughout their K-12 education. Some identified the Hmong as World Language classes as one of the best things that happened to them. They found that they did not learn only about Hmong history, culture, and language, but they also had a good
time taking the class. One former high school student reported that she enjoyed the class very much.

One of the best things in high school was the Hmong class. The reasons why was because like you know how we take history, science, English, and other courses. And we go there and we learn stuff and we took some tests, but we forget them right. But when we go to the Hmong class, we enjoy how we learn the language, and then the teachers taught us how to write poems, how to read books and we learn stuff about our culture that sometimes our parents tried to teach us, but we don’t listen or we just don’t get it. But actually, when we are in the Hmong class, and the teachers go over all those cultural stuff, and it gets you to think about it. Because you are with many other students who are just like you who also have the same experience like you do. And somehow you understand it better.

Furthermore, as the young Hmong American man, the only man in the focus group, started talking, he asserted that he only came back to the reality of who he was as a Hmong person after he had the chance to learn about himself.

I kind of shot me back to reality and made feel like being a Hmong person is not just all these primitive acts. But it is a community which embodied values that support...I kind seen the supports when I took this class. All those students helped me out.

Finally, not knowing the Hmong language and culture for the young Hmong American man was painful. In order to be able to make contributions to the Hmong American community and to fully participate with community events, young Hmong men need to understand and be able to communicate with their parents and elders. It took this young Hmong man many years to learn the Hmong language and Hmong cultural activities such as the traditional Hmong wedding ceremonies and the Ua Neeb, Shaman performance. As a result of being able to discover himself, he stated that he became a whole Hmong man again.
This class helped me to communicate with my mom and my dad. And also identifying certain cultural steps of a wedding and the procedures that the OG, elders, have to go through in order to get the wedding to complete. I also learned about the gathering of the Shamen. That was the prominent way for me to learn about what a Shamen does, the Shamen’s benefits and roles in the Hmong community. The Shamen is huge figure in the Hmong society and then that kind of made me realized that when I attend a shamanism event, not just my dad just taking me but because it is a great cause for us.

Major Theme #3: The positive impact of Hmong World Language Class on American-born Hmong students and Thailand-born Hmong Students – differences and similarities. The results for this theme are presented first in terms of differences between the Thailand-born students and the US-born students, and then their similarities.

Differences for Thailand-born students. When Hmong newcomer students entered BB High School, they were already behind many grade levels in English and other content areas. In order for them to accelerate their English proficiency and to be able to perform at the minimum level to meet high school graduation requirements, they had to take special classes to help them. Although the Hmong as World Language class was not considered one of these special classes for Hmong newcomer students, the students indicated that it was one of the most helpful and appropriate courses for them take. One of the young Hmong Americans contended that she was able to learn many academic skills in the Hmong language class. She stated that the class assignment gave her the opportunity to learn English, the research process, to practice her English-to-Hmong or Hmong-to-English translations and to conduct her presentation in front of the class.
One former newcomer student stated that knowing how to read and write the Hmong language enabled her to access health care information from the health care clinic and that was very helpful.

*The Hmong language class helps me too.* Tam sim no kuv mus tom tsev kho mob los lawv yeej muab lawv cov ntaub ntawv txhais ua ntawv Hmoob *(Now when I go to the hospitals, I see that the hospitals have translated some of their documents into Hmong).* Txawm hais tias kuv nyeem tsis tau ntawv Askiv zoo los kuv nyeem cov ntauv Hmoob no xwb ces kuv yeej to taub zoo lawm *(This helps me a lot even though I cannot read English that well).* Kuv nyeem cov ntauv Hmoob thia thnawv Askiv thia ces haj yam pab tau *(I read both the Hmong and English and it is helpful)*.

*Differences for US-born students.* For young Hmong Americans that were born in the US, the impact of the Hmong language on them was about trying to find their way back to their roots and trying to understand their culture. As they were discussing their experiences, the young man in the group reported that he really enjoyed the class project, especially the opportunity to learn the Hmong traditional marriage practice.

*The best part about the Hmong language class was that at the end of the class we had a project. We had to present a particular Hmong cultural practice. I think we picked marriage and we recorded three days of how we actually do a Hmong marriage ceremony. I thought we did a mediocre job and not like a real practice of Hmong culture.*

When the young Hmong Americans were expressing their thoughts and feelings about their bad attitude toward their parents and how they had treated their parents, they were very sad. At the table, there was a moment of silence. The young man at the center of the table was very thankful for the Hmong language class for helping him to find his way back. He used to think that his parents were unintelligent and could not help him
with schoolwork like other American parents did. He soon after realized that he had the best parents and that they were very wise. He came to appreciate his parents very much.

*I think the Hmong class helps me a lot at home. Before I took the class, when I looked at my parents, I thought why they were so dumb and why they didn’t know English. They didn’t know anything; they couldn’t help me with my homeworks except driving me to school and telling me to work hard in school. After I took the class, I realized that my parents are very wise. Even though, they do not know English, they know a lot about the Hmong culture. They are very good with the Hmong culture. If I ever need anything about the Hmong culture, they will give it or do it for me.*

For many Hmong American families, the means of communication within the family have been crippled for a long time and that has been one of the challenges in building and maintaining relationships between parents and their children and between grandparents and grandchildren in the family. The focus group participants talked about this distance brought on by language loss and seemed to feel that there was hope on the horizon. According to the serious dialogues of the young Hmong Americans, the Hmong language class not only played the role of providing the opportunity for them to learn the Hmong language, culture, and history, but also played a role in reuniting the Hmong American families. A young Hmong woman proudly announced that she now could socialize with her parents, elders, and other Hmong members in the community.

*The Hmong language class helped me to translate and paub tham nrog cov laus thiab kuv niamb thiab kuv txiv lawv (to be able to communicate with elders and my parents). Now I do not have problems socializing with other Hmong persons.*

From the Hmong cultural context, a Hmong young man and woman each are responsible for different roles. For too long, many young Hmong American men have been lost due to the cultural and language gaps that exist within the family and
community. The Hmong young man from the group was electrifying when he shared what happened to him after taking the Hmong language class. He told the group that he now could communicate better with his parents, and as a result, he had learned about how the traditional Hmong wedding protocol and ceremony was done, why the healing of the traditional Hmong Shaman was important and what he needed to know and do in order to access the Shaman’s services.

Similarities. As discussed above, the young Hmong Americans that were born in Thailand benefited more from the Hmong language class in the areas of speeding up their learning in school and academic culture and academic skills while those that were born in the United States, benefited more from finding their way back to their origin or starting place. Learning about the Hmong way of life today and in the past, and the rich oral language that usually expresses thoughts and feelings through kwv txhiaj, lus taum huam, or nkauj (poetry,) were some of the things that the young Hmong man and women came to cheerish. One young woman described her experience in the Hmong language class.

Kuv xav hais tias cov hoob Hmoob no kuj pab tau kuv ntau kawg thiab (I think the Hmong language classes have helped me a lot). Tus xib fwb qhia peb txog Hmoob kev cai (The teacher taught us about Hmong culture and way of life). Piv xam hais tias yus yuav mus pe neeb yus yuav ua li cas thiab hais li cas? (For example, when you want to ask for a Shaman’s help, what do you need to do? How do you approach him or her?). Thaum ho muaj ib siab ob qes, yus yuav mus pab lawv yus ho yuav hais li cas? (At the Hmong funeral, how do you thank people?) Nws qhia txog txoj kev cai es thaum yus yuav nrog cov laus tham yus yuav hais lus li cas cov laus thiaj li yuav hwm yus thiac saib yus rau qhov chaw rau nqe (When you have a conversation with elders, how do you carry your conversation so you can gain your respects). Thaum kawg no kuv xav hais tias lub hoob Hmoob yeej pab tau kuv kom kuv coj tau ib tug cwj pwm zoo kom kuv rov qab mus pab tau kuv cov Hmoob (Finally, I believe that the Hmong classes
that I took have shaped and contributed many positive things into my personal life in order for me to give back to the Hmong community).

Again, since oral language has played a very big and important role in the Hmong culture, almost all the major ceremonies and political ideas and courtship practices are expressed through poetry. In order for a Hmong young man or woman to be accepted as a mature and responsible adult in the Hmong society, they have to be proficient in Hmong culture; specifically, they have to know how to cite verses or poems for a variety of occasions. One young Hmong woman thought the best part for her in her class was learning how to write Hmong poetry.

Qhov best tshaj rau kuv yog thaum peb kawm txog keeb kwm Hmoob thiab sau txog paj huam (The best part for me was when we learned about the Hmong history and how to write Hmong poetry). Thaum tseem nyob tim Thaïb Teb los kuv yeej nyiam paj huam tiam sis kuv ho tsis tau paub hais tias lawv ho sau li cas (I already heard and like Hmong poetry when I was still in Thailand, but I didn’t know how to write it). Ces thaum kuv los kawm lub hoob no, tus xib fwb qhia hais tias koj yuav sau li cas koj thiaj sau tau txoj paj huam zoo, thaum koj bib koj yuav bib li cas? (Then when I took this Hmong language class, the teacher taught us how to write it, how do you start writing from the beginning?).

**Major Theme #4: The long term impact of participation in Hmong World Language class on students as they move into adulthood.** Growing up in the US, many Hmong young men never had the chance to learn about themselves. Similar to many Hmong young men, they perceived themselves as not modern. This young man now was proud to be a Hmong person.

After all the years I took other classes and I thought being Hmong was a primitive. It was an essential value to be a Hmong person. I felt negative from the society in a way that which made feel like being Hmong was not a part of me. Maybe I should not be Hmong.
As a Hmong man in the Hmong culture, a man has to be skilled and knowledgeable about the content and procedures of the basic Hmong cultural ceremonies or rituals. It took a long time for this young Hmong American man to learn, but he did it. This young man learned about the Hmong traditional wedding and shaman ceremonies and, as he put it, “the procedures that the OG (Old Guy), elders have to go through.”

As the young Hmong Americans continued to sort out what they had learned from the class and what had changed them, a young Hmong American woman indicated that once she learned about her identity, she became more positive about herself and had more confidence in whatever she did.

*After I took the classes, I learned many things and it helped me to have more confidence about myself. I felt more positive afterwards.*

Once the young Hmong Americans knew their identity, learned about their culture and had more confidence in themselves, they were ready to take on the world. As they talked to each other about their future, they were happy and excited. All the eight participants were college students. The young man stated that he liked politics so he wanted to first study about government, “For my future, I am pursuing a degree in Government. Now, I am concentrate on international politics.” One young woman jumped for joy and reported that she would be transferring to UC Irvine to pursue her degree in business, “I would like to transfer mus rau UC Irvine and I want to get my bachelor degree in business. After that I would like to get my master in business too.”
Lastly, a young woman also reported that she considered attending California State University in Sacramento after graduating from Sacramento City College. She intended to major in Nursing and come back to work in the community.

Kuv tseem tab tom (I am still attending) Sacramento City College. Tom qab kuv kawm tov tas lawm, kuv npaj transfer mus rau tim Sacramento State University mus kawm kom tau ib daim (After I completed my studies at Sacramento City College, I would like to transfer to Sacramento State University to pursue my) BA or BS in Nursing.

Major Theme #5: Hmong World Language class has a positive impact on student’s relationships with family, community and self-identity. The positive observations and remarks among the young Hmong Americans brought tears of joy to the whole group. Success, as defined by the young Hmong Americans, included achieving high academic performance in school and also knowing about who you are, where you have been, and where you want to go in the future. They all had dreams and aspirations and wanted to achieve great success and improve the conditions of the Hmong American community. The young Hmong American man was very pleased with knowing about his roots and showed great appreciation for his culture. It took him many years to achieve this realization, but he truly came back in a full circle of knowing who he was.

After taking the Hmong classes, I have learned myself, my culture, my roots, and my heritage, about where I came from and how much value I was. ... ... Since then, I had a more positive outlook on the Hmong and myself.

As the focus group continued to reflect on the positive impacts of the Hmong language classes, they saw clearly how they have benefited. They first learned how to read, write, and communicate with their family and elders in the community. They came
to understand the great needs of the Hmong American community and what roles they
should play in order to make progress in their families and the community. After having
better communication and relationships with family members, one young woman wanted
to be a good role model for younger siblings. As the oldest daughter in a Hmong family,
she played a very important role and had a big responsibility to help her parents with
household chores and to take care of her younger siblings after she came home from
school. Due to this motivation, she continued to study hard in college.

…Thaum kuv rov qab mus kawm ntawv Hmoob nyob rau high school, kuv txawj
sau ntawv Hmoob, nyeem ntawv Hmoob, paub translate (the Hmong language
class that I took in my high school improved my reading, writing, and translation
tremendously). And then thaum kuv mus tham nrog tej laus kuv yeej txawj hais
thiab paub hais lus Hmoob rau lawv thiab (I since then can communicate well in
Hmong with other elders in the community). Rau kuv family mas rau qhov kuv
yog tus ntxhais hlob, kuv muaj ntai yam ua hauv tsev, muaj ntai yam ua tom
school (As an oldest daughter in the family, I have a lot of work at home in
addition to school works). Thiaib kuv muaj young siblings ces kuv xav kom kuv
ua tau ib tug role model rau lawv kom lawv rau siab mus kawm ntawv ib yam li
kuv (I have younger siblings and I want to be a good role model for them so they
can go to college like me).

The Hmong young man wanted to give back to the community by being a
resource for young Hmong American students because he would like to see them make
progress in school and have a better future.

…I felt like getting to the community is one the primary instincts that I have. I
want to be able to give back as much as I can and also to help Hmong students.
Even if they don’t need my help, I can be a source or place for them to come. So
they progress in their future.

As a final point, the young Hmong Americans were very proud of and excited
about the knowledge that they had gained from the Hmong language classes. They
argued that they had acquired some important and useful skills and wanted to use these
skills to help other needy people in the community. One young woman indicated that
she would like to become a nurse and come back to work in the Hmong American
community. She proudly asserted that with her Hmong bilingual skills, as a nurse, she
would be very helpful to elders in the community.

Kuv xav los ua ib tug nurse kho mob nyob rau hauv Hmoob community (I would
like to become a nurse and work in the Hmong community). Niaj hnub no mas kuv
pom tau hais tias peb cov Hmoob mus tom tsev kho mob mas pheej yuav tau muaj
neeg los txhais lus xwb (I see that a lot of Hmong patients still need translation
and interpretation at the hospital). Tiam sis tej thaum muaj tej lo lus loj loj ces
yog tus txhais lus ntawv nws paub tsis tshuam zoo ces nws txhais tsis tau kom
meej meej rau cov laus (Sometimes the translations and interpretations are not
clear). Kuv xav hais tias yog kuv tau ua ib tug nurse ces kuv yuav tau los pab cov
laus sawv daws (When I become a nurse, I would like to help elders in the
community).

Major Theme #6: Effects of the need for and the offering of Hmong World
Language class on the school itself. According to the focus group discussions, the
Hmong language classes played many important roles in assisting Hmong American
students to be successful in school, including keeping them out of trouble and
encouraging them to study harder. The classes also helped them reconnect with their
families and their community. Hmong American high school students had unique
challenges and needs. Due to the loss of their language and culture, many of them could
not communicate and did not have good relationships with their parents at home and their
elders in the community. One young man was in high spirits when he reported that the
Hmong language class enabled him to understand and appreciate his parents for their love
and caring.
After I took the class, I realized that my parents are very wise... If I ever need anything about the Hmong culture, they will give it or do it for me.

For many young Hmong Americans who used to be newcomer students, learning how to read and write English did not just happen in the ELD and/or SDAIE classes; it also took place in the Hmong as World Language classes. After struggling or failing to learn how to write essays in the English classes, many of the young women were proud and glad to have a second chance through the Hmong language classes where the instructions were provided bilingually in their heritage language, Hmong.

Thaum kuv kawm English es kuv sau essays nav tiam sis yog kuv tsis paub sau no ces kuv rov los xav txog cov ideas uas kuv tau kawm nyob hauv cov Hmoob class ces kuv muab coj los compare ces ua rau kuv pom qhov different ces qhov no ua rau rov qab muaj idea sau ntawv tuaj lawm (When I took my English classes, I did not know how to write my essays. However, I thought about the lessons on how to write essays in the Hmong language classes and I used these same ideas to write my essays).

One of the outcome themes of the Hmong language classes was the benefits that students got out of the classes. Young Hmong Americans reported that they did not just learn how to speak, read, and write Hmong and learn about the Hmong culture and history, but they also learned about the school and academic culture. This was especially true for newcomer students. Learning through Hmong language instruction how to conduct research, including how to read and write English, how to translate from English to Hmong and from Hmong to English, and then how to develop and present their findings to the class was one of the most important experiences newcomer students had in the school system.
Finally, all the young Hmong Americans in the focus group found that the Hmong as World Language classes were important and led to positive changes in their lives. The benefits of taking the Hmong language classes were many. Being bilingual in Hmong enabled young Hmong Americans to help themselves, help the community, and get a job. A former high school newcomer student indicated that she would recommend that her siblings and other Hmong students take the Hmong language classes in the future.

Kuv pom zoo hais tias peb cov Hmoob, cov phooj ywg, cov brothers thiab sisters yuav tsuam tau kwam Hmoob no (I agree that the Hmong language classes will benefit Hmong high school students, my friends, my brothers, and sisters). Hoob Hmoob no tseem ceeb rau lawv kwam rau qhov yuav ua tau kom lawv txawj nyeem thiab sau ntawv Hmoob, kwam kom paub txog lawv tus kheej hais tias lawv yog leej twg (The Hmong language classes will help Hmong students to learn how to read and write and to learn about who they are). Hoob Hmoob no yuav txhawb nqa tau lawv kom thaum lawv mus ua hauj lwm lawv thiaj pab tau peb cov niam txiv Hmoob (These Hmong language classes will provide the language skills for a person when they serve the Hmong community). Thaum cov niam txiv tsis paub lus Hmoob los lawv thiaj li txhais tau rau lawv (So the individuals can provide translation and interpretation for Hmong parents who need their help). Tsis tas li ntawv yog thaum lawv txawj, yog ho muaj lwm haiv neeg xav kwam lus Hmoob los thiaj li yuav muaj peev xwm qhia tau rau lawv (If they are proficient in Hmong, they can also teach others that want to learn the Hmong language). Qhov no thiaj yuav ua rau lwm haiv kwam tau lus Hmoob (This will enable others to learn the Hmong language).

Major Theme #7: Impact of teachers – the good, the bad and the ugly. Some of the young Hmong women in the focus group were scratching their heads or tense when they reported about the types of teachers they had. These recent high school graduates knew and understood that some of these teachers did not do a good job of teaching. One young woman was frustrated and asserted that schools should hire only teachers with the appropriate teaching credential to teach their assigned courses. She described her
experience of having a math teacher teach the English class that she took. She was
confused and frustrated because the teacher did not know what he was doing according to
her.

Yog hais tias muaj ib tus tib neeg es nws yuav qhia lub school ntawv nav, kuv xav
kom lawv ask nws hais tias nws qhov best subject los yog nws qhov subject es
nws keej teach tshaj plaws seb yog dab tsi nav (If there is a teacher that would
like to teach in a school, the school should ask him or her to see what is his or her
area of expertise or the subject that he or she can best teach). Tiam sis yogi b
tus xib fwb nws yuav los ua ib tus Math teacher tiam sis lawv tsis muaj enough
English teacher, es yog lawv muab nws teach English xwb nav, ces nws tsuas
follow raws phau book xwb nav (If a Math teacher was given an assignment to
teach English, if the school didn’t have enough English teacher, this teacher
would only follow the textbook). Sometimes the teacher is very confused. Nws
twb tsis tshua skills to teach English nav (The teacher didn’t have the proper
skills to teach English). The teacher just followed the textbook. Yog nws ua li
ntawv ces yus haj yam tsis paub vim nws pab tsis tau yus (When the teacher was
doing that I got even more confused myself). Tej thaum yog nws siv nws lub tswv
yim ces ho tsis muaj nyob hauv textbook lawm (One time the teacher used his
own idea, but then his idea was not in the textbook). Ces lawv muab homework
rau yus ces yog yus yuav ua los yog nws lub tswv yim xwb tsis muaj nyob hauv
textbook ces haj nyuaj (The assigned homework was very difficult because it was
not in the textbook). Yog li no tus tib neeg uas nws yuav qhia peb lub tsev qhia
ntawv mas nws yuav tsum muaj qhov subject uas nws paub zoo tshaj plaws mas
nws thiaj muaj knowledge thiab muaj skills los teach (Because of this, the school
should only hire a teacher that has the proper teaching credential to teach in a
school).

Many of the recent high school graduates admitted that they did not ask their
teachers for help all the time for many reasons. Sometimes they did not want to bother
their teachers because they were shy and at other times, they knew their teachers would
not be able to help them understand the lessons. A young woman described that she tried
to ask her teacher questions many times because she felt comfortable with him, but no
matter how many times she tried to ask, her teacher could not help her understand the
lesson. Instead of using new methods to teach or explain the concept, he continued to repeat the same process over and over again. As result, this did not do much good for the student.

Nws yog tus teacher uas kuv feel comfortable, ces kuv yeej always tsa tes, but everytime kuv ask nws nav, nws always explain the same thing rau yus (I felt comfortable with this teacher, so I did raised my hand when I had questions. But everytime when I asked him a question, he always explain the same thing to me). But I didn’t understand so kuv rov qab tsa tes dua (I asked him again). Ces nws rov start everything all over from the beginning to the end. Ces yus mloog qhov ntawv ob peb zaug ces yus nkees dhau mloog hwv lawm (I listened to him over and over again and then I got really tired). Yus explain los nws tsis understand hos nws explain los yus tsis understand (When I explained he didn’t understand and when he explained, I didn’t understand). Ob peb tug mas kuv tsis tshua ask questions ntau li ib tug (There were only one teacher that I asked more questions then the others). I don’t know if it was me or it was the teacher.

One young woman explained that one of her reasons for not asking her subject area teachers for help was she did not have confidence in them. She asked a math teacher, for example, to help with her English assignment because this teacher could show her how to complete her school assignments. She explained her trust in the following way:

Thaum kuv kawm nyob rau high school, yog muaj tej yam kuv tsis paub xws li English (English was one of the areas that I needed help with in high school). Yog hais tias kuv nug tsis tau tus English teacher ces kuv yeej mus nug Math teacher (If my English teacher was not available or could not help me then I would asked my Math teacher for help). Rau kuv mas yog muaj ib tug teacher twg yog nws ua rau kuv tsis to taub nws los yog tsis muaj confidence nyob hauv nws lub hoob nav, kuv tsis muaj peev xwm pais nug nws (For me, if my teacher could not teach well or if I didn’t have confidence in his or her class then I usually did not asked for help). Kuv yuav tsum mus nug tus uas kuv muaj confidence nrog nws tham (I had to go to the teachers that I had confidence that he or she could help me). Thaum kuv nyob rau hauv high school, kuv yeej muaj ob peb tug teachers uas kuv feel confidence nrog lawv tham (In high school, I had many teachers that I had confidence with and I usually talked to them). Muaj ob
As the focus group continued to share their experiences with their high school teachers, many of them pointed out helpful teacher characteristics and effective teaching strategies. Many of them still remembered clearly the gentleness and compassion of their teachers. One former high school student contended that she had great teachers who took the time to teach, explain, and summarize to make sure those students comprehended lessons. This student’s statements have been presented earlier in this chapter. The student’s comments included the following:

*I just realize that the teacher helped us and supported us a lot... He took time to talk about the chapter and explain everything in details... After his thorough and in-depth explanation, he then asked us to reanalyze the chapter again... I think he was a really good teacher. He helped us out a lot.*

Again, here the focus group had a conversation about why they considered some of their teachers to be great. One recent high school graduate asserted that the bilingual Hmong teacher implemented many strategies in his class, which enabled her to write good letters, sing traditional Hmong songs, and get to know other students through these classroom activities.

*Tus xib fbw qhia ntawv Hmoob tau zoo heev (This teacher taught the Hmong language class really well). Kuv nyiam nws cov method nws siv los qhia peb nyeem thiab sau ntawv Hmoob (His method of teaching us in the class was very helpful for me). We had to write penpal letters. We had to make skits with classmates. We had spelling tests and we had to write poems. Tej thaum peb hais kwv txhiaj los yog hu nkauj rau*
everyones (Sometimes we sang traditional Hmong songs or modern Hmong songs for everyone in the class). Qhov no kuj ua rau kawm txog (These activities allowed me to learn more about) different Hmong students: traditional and Americanized Hmong students. I learned a lot my own backgrounds. I at least know where I stand now.

Finally, after these former high school students left high school, they still remembered the teaching strategies that their teachers applied. A student explained how her teacher taught math to her and her colleagues.

Muaj ib tus Math teacher nws txawj qhia heev vim hais tias nws tsis yog muab ib qhov idea los qhia xwb (One Math teacher that I had was great because he or she didn’t use just one idea to teach us). Nws muab ntau ntau qhov steps los qhia rau peb (This teacher used many steps or examples to teach us). Nws qhia qhov ib yog hais peb tsis nkag siab los nws hais tias tsis ua cas (If the students didn’t understand the first example, he would say, “Don’t worry”). Nws mam qhia dua qhov step thib ob, ua in different ways (The teacher then used a second or a different method to teach us). Nws qhia kuv kom kuv paub qhov concept. (The teacher taught me the new concept). Ib qhov concept xwb twb muaj li ntawm 3 qhov steps los yog 4 different ways los ua lawm (There were three to four steps to work on just one concept). Nws qhia hais tias yog koj to taub qhov way twg zoo tshaj ces koj nco qhov ntawv thib siv qhov ntawv xwb (The teacher shared with and recommended us to use and/or apply only the approach that we feel comfortable and like best to solve Math problems). Hos yog qhov twg koj tsis to taub thiab koj tsis tau ua ces koj tsis txhob siv (We should forget about methods that are difficult for us). Nws qhia li ntawv rau kuv ces kuv nco tau Math zoo heev. (The way that this teacher taught mathematic was very helpful for me).

Results as Framed by the Research Questions, and the Story behind Them

This section will now summarize results as framed by the research questions. It will combine observations and insights from the quantitative data, the teacher interviews, and the student focus group. The researcher has not repeated the detailed textual analysis that was performed on the two sets of qualitative data. Rather, this section seeks to
integrate the analyses from the three data sets in order to systematically address the
research questions.

Q1: Does the completion of the two years of Hmong language courses have any
correlation with or impact upon various measures of student achievement such as
students’ high school graduation, Grade Point Average (GPA), California Standardized
Test results in English Language Arts (ELA) and Math, and school attendance?

From the quantitative data analyses, one finding stands out. There is a
statistically significant (p=.007) modest positive correlation (.235) between student
participation in two years of Hmong World Language and GPA. This correlation
indicates that Hmong American high school students who took at least two years of HWL
have benefited from the classes in terms of a higher GPA.

There were other benefits as well, as reported by the teachers and the students in
the focus group. For example, the focus group participants talked about how they learned
to write better essays through the HWL classes. This skill was then translated into their
performance in other classes, such as their ELA class, their Senior Project and other
courses. This skill undoubtedly contributed to a better performance across the board,
which is reflected in the correlation between HWL and GPA.

Although taking two years of HWL correlates positively with GPA, it has a
negative correlation with CST scores in ELA (-.177), CST scores in Math (-.150), and
attendance (-.197). There are good reasons for these negative correlations. First of all,
the CST tests reflect students’ cumulative knowledge of the English language and
mathematics acquired over their entire course of schooling prior to taking the particular
tests. Students have not had the opportunity to take Hmong World Language classes until
they enter high school. For some, the class involved the last two years of high school. This is not a timely opportunity to affect the entire course of their acquisition of ELA and math skills at the highest level. Secondly, teachers can establish guidelines for the courses they teach, which include more measures of mastery than performance on standardized tests like the CST. These measures of mastery -- doing research, writing papers, making presentations, writing business letters, etc.-- may have been affected by the confidence and knowledge the students acquired in their Hmong World Language classes, leading to the positive correlation between the HWL classes and GPA, even though the students continued to struggle with the question formats of the CST. Indeed, when the focus group participants reflected on the struggles they faced in meeting some of the high school requirements, they often made a contrast between the help and support they felt they had received in the HWL classes and the lack of support they often experienced in their other classes:

In one more interesting and initially paradoxical finding, students who took HWL classes had a somewhat less complete attendance record than students who did not. Nonetheless, they had higher overall GPAs than the Hmong students who did not take the classes. Indeed, it is possible that new young Hmong American leadership and traditional community ties are responsible both for their occasional absences and their interest in learning about the Hmong language, culture, and history. Hmong students who took the Hmong language classes may well be more proficient in the Hmong language and culture and have a better understanding of the needs of their family, the
community, and the community at large. As soon as they have enough bilingual skills, providing bilingual services such as interpretations, translations, and/or filling out basic official documents at the hospitals, schools, or government offices for their parents or members of the community are some things that they are expected to do. This is very common for all immigrant families where the parents have limited English skills.

Additionally, one of the best ways to retain and learn about the traditional Hmong culture such as weddings and funeral ceremonies and performances for Hmong American high school students is for them to get involved and participate in the events directly. At the same time, they also share the cultural and social responsibilities in the family and community. From the Hmong cultural context, a young man and woman each have roles that they must fulfill at certain moments in their lifetime that no one else will be able to fulfill. As a result of having to attend school in the US, fewer and fewer young Hmong men and women are participating in these kinds of events, and those who do often feel awkward and unskilled.

Finally, as future leaders in the Hmong American community, it seemed from the data that Hmong students who took HWL classes understood and knew the struggles of the Hmong people and challenging issues facing the community more than those who did not take the HWL classes. The students got directly involved themselves in helping solve the problems in the community. For example, when the Hmong American community gathered in the period between 2007 to 2009 to protest the arrest and criminal charges against Hmong American leaders such as General Vang Pao and eleven others, the
students became engaged and visible in the community, helping to organize, prepare for
and/or to join the rallies through which the Hmong American people expressed their
solidarity with each other and displeasure with the actions of the American government.
Indeed, participating in events like these and family and community-wide traditional
events, required Hmong American high school students to be absent from their classes,
but this is the kind of education that they also need in order to achieve their life purpose
and to serve their community. Additionally, one of the best ways to retain and learn
about the traditional Hmong cultural practices such as weddings and funeral ceremonies
is for the students to get involved and participate directly in these events. This is an
education, which cannot be acquired in any other way. Participation in these cultural
events may have also had an impact on attendance.

Q2. What differences in demographic characteristics can be identified among Hmong
American students in this sample who choose to take two years of Hmong world language
in high school?

At the time that the last wave of Hmong refugees were being prepared for transfer
to the United States starting in 2004, the researcher, working from within the central
office of the ABC School District, collaborated with school teachers, administrators,
parents, and the community members to develop a proposal to meet the unique needs of
the newcomer students. The concern was that these newcomer students had needs that
the regular classroom teachers could not effectively address without well-structured
educational programs and appropriate resources to support teachers. The more school
administrators could create structural solutions to address learning needs of atypical
students in the classroom, the more teachers would be better able to teach. Creating a learning environment where a ninth grade Hmong newcomer student, who can only read and write English at a first grade level, could have access to Hmong bilingual teachers and/or core curriculum and instruction delivered in their own Hmong language would have been one of the best ways to help these students make progress in school. Unfortunately, the proposal for the newcomer center was not adopted by the school district and no organized program for greeting and acclimatizing the students was developed. The Hmong language class became the default newcomer program for some Hmong newcomer high school students.

Not surprisingly, there was a statistically suggestive but not statistically significant (p=.059) negative correlation between English proficiency level and students who completed the two years of Hmong language classes, r=-0.166 (Table 7). This may very well have been due to the fact that the English proficiency levels of Hmong American high school students in this study included all the students who had been identified as Hmong in origin, including many born in the United States, who had either entered school as initial fluent English proficient (IFEP) or become reclassified fluent English proficient (RFEP) as well as current ELL students. It stands to reason that the students most recently arrived from the refugee camps of Thailand were not highly proficient in the English language. These were also the students who were most likely to choose to take two years of Hmong World Language. Thus, it is particularly notable that the same students who were most likely to have a lower level of English Language
Proficiency and most likely to choose to participate in two years of Hmong World Language somehow managed to produce GPA scores which exceeded those of Hmong American students who did not participate in the class. In essence, it seems that the HWL class had an “equity” function for students with lower English proficiency: it provided them with something “extra” or “beyond” the traditional curriculum, and there was a positive association between the class and GPA.

In the quantitative analysis of the data provided by the school district, there was a positive correlation between two variables: birth place and students who took at least two years of Hmong language classes, $r=0.183$, $n=130$, $p=.038$ (Table 7). Overall, there was a statistically significant ($p=.038$) and modest strength of correlation ($r=.183$) between Hmong American high school students who took at least two years of Hmong language classes and birth place. As noted earlier in this chapter, this relationship was particularly strong in regard to the female students who were born in Thailand. Indeed, the difference between males and females who participated in HWL among Hmong American students born in the United States was relatively small, while the difference between males and females taking HWL among the students born in Thailand was large. Nonetheless, the percentage of males born in Thailand who took two years of HWL was only a little smaller than the percentage of American-born males taking the class, and the overall participation rate of Thailand-born students was larger than the overall rate for American-born students.
This pattern of higher HWL enrollment among Thailand-born students indicates that Hmong high school newcomer students who completed at least two years of Hmong language classes may have benefited from the classes in a number of ways other than meeting a particular academic requirement. Indeed, as described by the students themselves and reflected in the analysis earlier in this chapter, the HWL program appears to have met some important needs in their orientation to their new home. Although characteristics such as being born in Thailand and having less English proficiency were associated with a lower GPA, this effect is moderated by the positive correlation between taking the Hmong World Language classes and GPA (.235). Indeed, the Hmong language classes may have provided a protective buffer for the non-English proficient Hmong newcomer students recently immigrated from Thailand. It would be an interesting additional subject of research to explore the reasons that so many female students born in Thailand took the HWL courses and how their involvement in this program related to their integration into the culture of the school and to their roles within their family systems.

Q3. Are these differences in demographic characteristics related to differences in the impact of participation in the courses for the various students?

According to the interview with the two high school Hmong bilingual teachers, there are some differences in the impact of Hmong World Language classes on US-born and Thailand-born Hmong students. First of all, the positive impact of the Hmong World Language classes on Thailand-born students includes the equitable educational opportunities that HWL classes provided for newcomer students. HWL classes helped
students to adapt to their new school environment and expose them to the academic culture more efficiently and effectively. For example, the teachers reported that at first, Hmong newcomer students were very quiet and shy in the classroom. The teachers had to coach them on how to be assertive in front of others and how to communicate their thoughts to others. Based on one teacher’s observations, newcomer students were able to make connections with other US-born Hmong American students in class. “When newcomers took my Hmong language classes and had the opportunity to connect with those that were born in this country, they learned about the school system and learning skills faster.” As a result, they were able to learn about the school and adapt to the academic culture and improve their English skills more rapidly. These observations were supported by the statements of the Thailand-born students themselves which described their frustration with the limitations of their academic program in other subjects, and the role that the HWL class played in helping them to learn how to understand both the system of the school and the requirements of their other classes.

On the other hand, for US-born Hmong American students, the teachers reported that the impact of Hmong language classes included, in particular, the opportunities for students to reconnect with their family and the community. Specifically, students learned about their heritage language, culture, and history. For most of Hmong high school students, the Hmong as World Language class was one of the few and/or best places them could learn about their Hmong identity. Since there are limited literature and curriculum resources available for the teachers, an educational field trip to the high mountains of
Thailand was coordinated by the teachers for students to learn more about their parents’ past. The teachers also affirmed that due to positive results and popularity of the class, more Hmong parents continue to want their children to enroll in the Hmong language class.

The focus group interviews with young Hmong Americans suggested that there were distinctions regarding the impact of Hmong World Language classes on Thailand-born Hmong and US-born students. As discussed at length earlier in this chapter, the young Hmong Americans who used to be newcomer students pointed out that they were able to learn many academic skills such as English, the research process, translation and interpretation from English-to-Hmong or Hmong-to-English. Students also learned how to conduct translations and presentation in front of the class. In addition, one former newcomer student stated that knowing how to read and write the Hmong language enabled her to access health care information from the health care clinic and that was very helpful. Finally, these students who were already dealing with the need to gain or retain fluency in two very dissimilar languages (Hmong and English) appreciated that they were spared the requirement that they acquire a third language such as French or Spanish just to meet a high school graduation requirement. They stated that their real need was to improve their competence in the two languages that are most important in their personal, professional and academic lives.

Consistent with what the teachers reported, the young Hmong Americans born in the United States indicated that their participation in the Hmong World Language was
helping them to learn their language, culture, and history, so they could find their way back to their roots. The loss of the Hmong language and cultural knowledge is hurtful to families and the Hmong American community and students themselves. When the young Hmong Americans were expressing their thoughts and feelings about their bad attitude toward their parents and how they felt they had treated their parents due to their misunderstanding, they were very sad.

The Hmong language class has played a role of bridging the gap between young Hmong Americans, the lost generations, and their parents and the community. Once these young men and women have found their way back to their family and community, they are very happy. The young man who participated in the focus group acknowledged that he learned a lot from the Hmong language class and was very thankful. For young Hmong Americans, the Hmong language class not only played the role of providing the opportunity for them to learn the Hmong language, culture, and history, but it also played a role in reuniting the Hmong American families.

Q4. What have been some of the consequences other than those reflected in the quantitative academic measurements, including personal, social or cultural consequences, for Hmong American students who participated in two years of Hmong World Language classes?

BB High School has been the high school in the Sacramento city and county that has been attracting the largest number of Hmong origin students. One of the main reasons for this has been the offering of the Hmong as World Language courses that have been taught by two full-time Hmong bilingual teachers. The Hmong World Language courses at BB High School play a very important role for Hmong American families and
their community because there are no other educational institutions that offer comprehensive courses that meet the California State’s world language standards taught by certified Hmong bilingual teachers. Many Hmong American high school students have traveled from their home school just to go to BB High School to take the HWL classes. Some other families had moved closer to BB High School so their children could attend the Hmong language classes. The researcher knows this because he lives in the Hmong American community, had taught the Hmong language courses at BB High School at an earlier time in its development, had worked in the ABC School District, and had known some of these families.

When the young Hmong Americans in the focus group reflected about their experience of participating and learning from the Hmong as World Language classes, they were very excited and extremely happy. They all agreed that they were very lucky to have such an opportunity to take the courses. One young woman asserted, “Kuv zoo siab tias kuv tau kawm txog Hmoob keeb kwm (I am very happy to have the opportunity to learn about Hmong history).” The Hmong language courses were not only necessary, but were also very special for them. Another young woman affirmed,

Kuv tau kawm hais tias peb Hmoob kuj muaj cov thawj coj thiab cov txawj ntse yav tas los (I have learned that the Hmong people have great leaders). Kuv twb yog Hmoob thiab (I am also a Hmong person). Hmoob kuj muaj cov txawj ntse li lwm leej lwm tus thiab ces qhov no ua rau kuv zoo siab hais tias kuv yog Hmoob (The Hmong people are as smart as other races or ethnic groups and so this has made me feel happy that I am a Hmong person).
They learned about many important life skills and acquired knowledge that would enable them to excel in school academically and in the end, to improve their lives and to help others in their community and the community at large.

The students learned how to speak, read, and write Hmong. Some of the young Hmong Americans were born in the US, so their Hmong heritage language skills were limited. Not being able to communicate well with their parents, some other very important people in their lives, including elders in their families and/or the community, the students have been hurt. They suffered, and misunderstood their parents for a long time.

Moreover, by not having a good command of the Hmong language, the students also did not have a good understanding of the family and community cultural wealth that were available to support them in school and their personal lives. With the new Hmong heritage language skills that they learned in the Hmong language classes, they enjoyed good conversations with their parents, grandparents, and other relatives in the community. Indeed, the students were able to read important health and/or government records and were able to provide interpretation and translations for elders in their family and community.

Finally, the young Hmong Americans in the focus group pointed out that learning and understanding the Hmong culture and history enabled them to go back to their own roots and reconnect with their families and community. Some of the young Hmong Americans finally understood why the Hmong people immigrated to the United States as
political refugees. They understood and appreciated the struggles that their parents or grandparents went through in order for them to survive and be able to immigrate to the US. They finally realized that their parents were not ignorant like they used to think because they did not speak English like other parents in this country do. They came to appreciate the wisdom, knowledge, and skills that their parents or grandparents had in regard to Hmong culture, history, and the remarkable survival skills that they had to have to survive their long political journey from the mountains of Laos to the urban cities in the United States.

Most of the young Hmong Americans, who used to be newcomer students that participated with the Hmong as World Language classes, were pleased that they had been able to maximize their learning opportunities through the guidance of the two Hmong bilingual teachers and their peers in the Hmong language classes. The teachers’ interview also supported this report by the focus group.

Two of the most effective and successful teaching strategies for Hmong newcomer students was the use of the Hmong heritage language in the instructions provided by the Hmong teachers, and the application of the academic research and writing skills they were learning in the HWL class to other courses in their program. Eventually, the young Hmong Americans felt confident and motivated and they worked harder in school because they had learned not only the Hmong language, culture, and history, but they also learned English language skills, study skills, how to write essays, reports, and poems, how to do research, how to translate or interpret, how to ask for help
from adults or students, and ultimately how to maneuver through the educational system in order for them to succeed in high school. Given that their academic levels were so far behind their high school peers when they entered high school, the value of the academic and social emotional supports and teacher guidance and peer support, which the Hmong newcomer students received from the Hmong as World Language classes, cannot be overestimated, particularly in regard to their role in helping these students to graduate from high school within such a short time period.

The two Hmong bilingual teachers were pleased with the positive results from the Hmong as World Language courses that they have taught for the past twelve and seven years at BB High School. The teachers reported that through the Hmong language classes, they were able to assist Hmong American high school students academically, socially, and emotionally both at school, at home, and in the community. First, through the Hmong World Language curriculum and the Hmong high school bilingual teachers’ personal effort, they were able to influence Hmong high school students to stay in school and not join gang groups. This was not only good for the students, parents, and the community, but it was good for the school as well. As a result of the elimination of Hmong American high school student gang violence activities on the school ground and in the community, the school campus and classrooms became more safe and conducive to learning. Students could walk to and from school without having to fight each other on the way. The teachers reported that the school Principal was very happy and supportive
of the Hmong language class due to positive results such as this. In the end, more Hmong American high school students were more engaged in their school work.

The Hmong teachers were very pleased when they described how Hmong American high school students have made considerable academic and/or social progress both in school and at home, once they had learned their language, culture, and history and gained important knowledge about their ethnic and cultural identity and distinctiveness.

One example of the academic progress at school that the teachers pointed out included the increasing number of valedictorians who were Hmong origin students at BB High School compared to past many years. One teacher asserted that Hmong American high school students had never achieved this level of leadership and social status and academic performance in the past. Furthermore, the teachers felt confident and were extremely pleased and wanted to take some credit for working hard with Hmong American high school students and their families to overcome their academic challenges.

Another achievement of the Hmong language class was the reconnecting and improvement of the relationship of the students with their families and the community. The teachers found that once the students gained knowledge and understood the roles of their parents, families, and the community and how they could tap into the family and community cultural wealth in supporting them in school and their personal lives. They wanted to work harder in school so they could one day give back to the family and community. Young Hmong American high school students started to care more about
themselves and their younger siblings or families. In the end, the students were happier and more positive about their lives.

Lastly, the Hmong bilingual teachers were very pleased to report that the Hmong as World Language classes were able to cover unique and relevant topics pertaining to Hmong American high school students that enabled them to study and pursue their high school career more successfully. The teachers explained that one of the obstacles preventing Hmong American high school students from achieving high academic performance was not knowing and understanding the requirements of the current educational system and how to go about accessing all resources in order to meet those requirements. The learning of problem solving strategies and resources and social networking in the Hmong language classes encouraged students to not give up and worked harder to complete the school requirements.

All the young Hmong Americans indicated that the Hmong as World Language classes helped them to believe in themselves and gave them the courage to stay focused so they could do what was needed to do in order to achieve their plans and dreams. Since all the participants in the focus group already attended colleges, they were not facing the choice of whether or not to attend college. Instead, they reported that they were all the more determined to study hard and to complete their study so they could get a job and earn a good income. Some of the young Hmong women asserted that they wanted to live a better life, a life that will be better than their parents’. They wanted to be able to buy a new car and a house one day and to make this their country.
The researcher found no notable negative consequences for the students who took the Hmong World Language Class or for the school district that offered it. While this conclusion might be influenced to some extent by the researcher’s choice of subjects and by his own involvement in the development of the program, nonetheless, both the quantitative and qualitative analyses point to positive outcomes from the presence of this course offering in the curriculum of BB High School.

Hmong as World Language course has been one of the most important things that have been offered to Hmong American high school students, the school and their community. It has provided meaningful and equitable educational opportunities for Hmong American high school students and encouraged them to do well in school and to reconnect with their family and the community.

The Hmong language classes have made a positive impact on schools by significantly reducing Hmong students’ involvement in gangs, fighting on school campus, and by improving student academic performance. For this reason, the teachers reported that the high school principal was very supportive of the HWL class. The direct role of the HWL class on gang activity is beyond the scope of this study and beyond its data, nonetheless, both teachers and, by their report, their principal, noted a reduction in gang activity as the HWL class became established at the high school. Indeed, the teachers pointed out that there is more demand for the Hmong World Language class than ever, with a waiting list of Hmong American students for limited class slots. Although the teachers pointed out that the offering and maintaining of the Hmong as World Language
courses was not easy, one teacher stated that school administrators supported and continued to expand the Hmong language program because they felt these courses had increased school attendance, eliminated gang-related fighting on the school campus and ultimately increased student academic performance. Thus, these teachers expressed great satisfaction that the classes are generally acknowledged to be effective in helping the school and students.

As discussed throughout this study, the Hmong World Language class has had a positive impact on student’s relationships with family, community and self-identity. One of the roles of the Hmong language class is to present meaningful questions and conversations about real issues that happened in the Hmong community and community at large and to teach students how to help solve these problems. The teachers see the class as preparing the students to engage with the society as a whole with confidence and the ability to stand up to biases and lack of understanding. With this inner strength, the young people will be prepared to become better citizens and ultimately become contributing members of society.

The hands-on learning approach of the Hmong language classes have provided learning opportunities for young Hmong Americans to learn about real and important issues pertaining to students in the community where they lived. Raising issues and having students involved with the process, has proved to be one of the best ways to teach history and to get these young men and women involved with the community.
In addition to learning about their identity, the young Hmong Americans have also learned how to read, write, and communicate with their family and elders in the community. They came to understand the great needs of the Hmong American community and what roles they should play in order to help their families and the community progress. The more these young Hmong Americans know about themselves, the more they want to give back to the community or to help the community. After having better communication and relationships with family members, one young woman wanted to be a good role model for younger siblings. Due to this motivation, she continued to study hard in college for her own benefit and to be an example to her younger siblings.

… Thiab kuv muaj young siblings ces kuv xav kom kuv ua tau ib tug role model rau lawv kom lawv rau siab mus kawm ntawv ib yam li kuv (I have younger siblings and I want to be a good role model for them so can go to college like me).

Indeed, based on the focus group interview, all the young Hmong Americans were very proud of and excited about the knowledge and values that they had acquired from the Hmong as World Language classes. They want to use the bilingual, cultural, and academic skills they have learned to help other needy people in the community.

Q5. What have been some of the long term (post-high school education, career, life satisfaction) consequences associated with two years of participation in the Hmong World Language class?

Some of the long term impacts of participation in Hmong as World Language classes on Hmong American high school students as they move into adulthood were indeed extraordinary. Indeed, according to the focus group interview, the most
significant impacts were not limited to just gaining literacy skills in the Hmong heritage language or earning credits for high school graduation but attaining clear vision about their dreams and goals. Likewise, the young Hmong Americans believed and had strong self-confidence that they would be successful in: 1) pursuing their college education; 2) giving back to the community once they finished college; and finally 3) living a better life than their parents did.

Pursuing a college degree was exciting, and it was one of the most significant investments for young Hmong Americans and their families. Many young Hmong Americans were the trailblazers because their parents or grandparents never had the opportunity to go to college. Some of the young women in the focus group explained that they had lived and seen enough life full with hardship and suffering from their parents, their married older sisters, or other former school friends, who dropped out from high school, and they wanted to pursue a better life.

Cov poj niam uas koj hais los no, lawv tau mus yuav txiv ntxov ntxov puas yog? (Many girls that you mentioned got married early right?). Lawv lub neej zoo li lawv rov qab tsis mus kawm ntawv (They did not go back school). Lawv rov pib lawv lub neej all over zoo li lawv niam lawv txiv lub neej (They live their life all over like their parents.) Mus nyob hauv tsev tu me nyuam thiab laus ces mus ua teb lawm xwb (They stay home to take of their children and then working on the farm). Kuv xav hais tias nyob lub teb chaws no yog yus tsis txhob mus yuav txiv es rau rau siab kawm ntawv kom tau ib daim degree es yus mus ua hauj lwm ces yus muaj nyiaj ces thaum ntawv yus lub neej tsis zoo ib yam li yus niam yus txiv lub neej lawm (In this country I know that when I go to school, have a degree, have a job, and then have money, I would not have to live like my parents again). Tsis yog li no ces yus yuav los nyob hauv tsev tu me nyuam lawm xwb (I would not just want to stay home to raise children). Yus yuav tsum tsis txhob depend rau yus tus txiv kom yus txiv thiab yus tsev neeg depend tau rau yus thiab (I don’t want to depend only on my husband, but when I get married I want my family to be able to depend on me). Thaum yus ua hauj lwm thiab muab nyiaj lawm ces
They understood that those with college degrees could get better jobs and earn higher incomes and achieve a rewarding and fulfilling career. Having a college degree would provide a better life for their family in the future.

All the participants in the focus group not only had the desire and determination to pursue a college degree, but they also had plans to finish their college education. Indeed, two out of the eight young Hmong Americans were attending California State University Sacramento, so they did not have any plan to transfer anywhere. Both of them anticipated graduating from Sacramento State. The young man wanted to pursue a degree in government and the young woman wanted to pursue a teaching credential in art and would like to come back and teach in the community. The other six young Hmong American women were attending Sacramento City College. One young woman would like to transfer to UC Irvine to pursue her career in business once she completed her lower division undergraduate program at the community college. In addition, two other young women would like to transfer to Sacramento State. One young woman had already prepared to get into the nursing program at Sacramento State. Finally, four other young women did not comment on where they would like to go after completing their community college degree or programs. However, they indicated that they intended to stay in their community college and were likely for now to continue to stay with their parents at home so they could help each other and enjoy the family security while they go
to college. It was notable that these female students described their families, including their parents, as very supportive of their college careers.

Although, the young Hmong Americans from the focus group were still in college, many of them already had plans and were interested in returning and giving back to the community. With the knowledge that they gained through the Hmong as World Language classes, they recognized the needs of the Hmong American community and wanted to make a positive impact for the next generations. The young man was very excited and appreciative when he started to learn about the Hmong traditional wedding ceremony and the way of the Shaman spiritual healing.

*This class helped me...identifying certain cultural steps The Shaman is huge figure in the Hmong society and then that kind of made me realized that when I attend a shamanism event, not just my dad just taking me but because it is a great cause for us.*

As a Hmong man in the Hmong culture, it was important for him to understand the purpose and reasons for this important ceremony and spiritual healing event. One of the best ways for him to fully support his parents and elders in the family and community and to carry on the tradition was for him to be able to participate in the events and share the responsibilities with family members and/or the community.

One young woman wanted to finish her nursing degree at Sacramento State and come back to work in the community, so she could help Hmong parents and elders who did not speak English. She pointed out that even when hospitals had an interpreter to provide interpretation services, sometimes they did not do it correctly and wrong information were given to their patients. This young woman wanted to become a nurse
herself because she could communicate in the Hmong language directly with Hmong parents and elders in the community. The English language barrier was one of the most common challenges for Hmong families when they first came to the United States. When visiting their doctors at the hospital, they usually needed a bilingual interpreter to help them with interpretations and/or translations. This may not seem important to people who have not experienced language barriers, but for many Hmong and other immigrant families this was one of the hardships that they had to live with. There were times when Hmong parents had to depend on their children to provide interpretations and translations for them at the hospitals. Indeed, experience like this inspired many young immigrant children to become professional service providers.

The participants reported that having role models and Hmong professionals to come back to work in the community would be one of the best ways to help Hmong Americans. One of the young women from the focus group stated that she wanted to become a role model for the young Hmong Americans, especially her younger siblings. Playing an important leadership role like this for her was expected because as an oldest daughter in the Hmong family, she had already resumed many responsibilities in the home by taking care of her siblings and by helping her parents with chores around the house. She was concerned that if she did not complete her college education, she would set as a bad example for her younger siblings. She was worried and would like to see them all perform well in school and become successful in their lives. As a result, in college, she had to work hard and tried her very best to complete her classes so she could
become a teacher no matter what challenges she encountered. She stated, “I would like to teach in a school where I can help Hmong students and help the Hmong community.”

Finally, the high school learning journey that the young Hmong American women and man in the focus group had with the Hmong as World Language class was remarkable. It changed their lives forever. They were very excited and wanted to make great things happen for themselves, their families, their community, and the community at large. They recognized the hardships that their parents, families, and the Hmong people went through and they were determined to pursue a better life for themselves and their community. They had a strong desire to make the American dream come true. They recognized that for Hmong Americans, one of the best ways to make their dreams a reality was to focus all their resources and energy into obtaining their college education.

Yus yog Hmoob, yus muaj qhov opportunity tuaj rau lub teb chaws Asmesliskas no (I am a Hmong person and I had the opportunity to come to America). Yus xav li no ces yus thiaj li rau siab kwam ntawv (When I thought about that, I work harder in school). Yus ntsia hais tias cov neeg Asmesliskas twb ua tau. Yus twb nrog lawv kwam ib hoob lawm, yus yeej yuav tsum ua tau thiab (I take the same class with American students, if they can do it, I can do it too). Nej ib txhia no twb kwam tau lus Thaib los yog lub Nplog, lus Asmesliskas los yeej zoo li ntawv thiab. (Many of you already learned the Thai or Lao languages, learning English should be doable just like learning those two languages).

They felt confident that getting a four year of college degree was achievable, regardless of their historical, cultural, or linguistic background, if the opportunity was presented. As reported above, one former newcomer Hmong American young woman bitterly described how she felt she had been held back academically by being placed in classes for English learners that lacked rigor or content. Yet she was determined to find a path between the community college level where her lack of preparation required her to start and the baccalaureate level where she was determined to go.
Indeed, the interview statement gathered from the two Hmong bilingual teachers also supported the focus group statement that Hmong American high school students who had participated with the HWL courses for two or more years during their high school career had more confidence in themselves. One of the teachers proudly asserted that

...*With the activities in class, they become more socially active in class and more confident in themselves. Their self-esteem also increased and yog lawv xav ua dab tsi los lawv yeej ua tau (if they want to do anything, they can do anything).*

Chapter Summary

The first part of Chapter 4 covered the research questions that formed the basis for this study and the rationales for the changes in the focus of the research questions as the study proceeded. The researcher described how the original focus of the study and the quantitative data associated with the original focus (effect of Hmong World Language class on objective measures of student success) were not sufficient to tell the story of the outcomes of the HWL program at the level of the school, the students and the community. The original question did not address all the possible consequences of the Hmong as World Language courses for participants who completed the two years of Hmong as World Language courses. Likewise, limiting the study to the original narrow question would not have given the researcher the opportunity to hear the life stories of the Hmong American students who had participated in the Hmong language program and the teachers that have taught the Hmong World Language courses for the past several years.
A mixed method of study was therefore adopted so that a richer story could be identified and shared.

As a part of the process, the researcher discovered that it would be best to add additional qualitative research questions to the original questions in order for this study to address more of the implications of the HWL program. Consequently, four questions were added. These questions enabled the researcher to explore the impacts of the Hmong as World Language courses on Hmong American high school students, including those born in Thailand and those born in the United States, on their families, their community, on the school itself and the community at large. These research questions addressed not only the academic performance of the students, but also the personal success of the students above and beyond school performance.

Next, the chapter described in detail the data used in this study. The section first discussed the quantitative data that the researcher obtained from the ABC School District. Next, the section described the qualitative data, which involved two data sets from two groups of participants. The first qualitative data collection involved the interviewing of the two Hmong bilingual teachers. This was important because they were some of the key trained professionals that had been observing the academic, social, and emotional progress of Hmong high school students that had participated in the Hmong language courses. The second qualitative data collection process involved the focus group interview of young Hmong American recent high school graduates, seven women and one man, who had participated in two years of the Hmong language program.
The chapter next presented and discussed the descriptive statistics, which identified various characteristics of the Hmong American students who attended the high schools within the ABC school district during the time period examined by the study. This descriptive data compared the percentages of subjects, including those born in the United States and in Thailand, the percentages of males and females in this group, the percentages who participated with the Hmong as World Language classes, and other demographic characteristics of this group. As part of the quantitative data analysis, the researcher discussed the use of Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient for analyzing the Zangle data from the school district and the outcomes of this analysis. A table was created to show the correlations, statistical significance, the strength of the correlations, and their direction. A table of the actual correlation output from the analyses was also created. The relevance of the findings from the correlation analysis for questions one, two, and three were discussed.

Next, the qualitative data were discussed. As noted earlier, two groups of subjects were investigated using two different qualitative techniques (oral interview and focus group) and two sets of qualitative data generated. The first qualitative data set was the teacher interviews. The researcher explained how the qualitative data was collected. In his analysis of the data collected through the teacher interviews, the researcher explained how he transcribed, coded the data, and organizing the topics. In the end, five themes emerged from the teacher interviews and those five themes were reported.
The second qualitative data set was the focus group interviews. Eventually, seven major themes emerged from the focus group interviews and these themes were also explored through the words of the young Hmong Americans who participated in the focus group.

The last part of the chapter utilized all three data sources to address the research questions and elaborate on the story residing in the data. The researcher discussed important insights and findings that emerged from the data analyses for each of the five research questions.

In summary, one quantitative finding stands out in regard to the first research question. There was a positive correlation between student participation in two years of Hmong World Language and the students’ GPAs. This finding suggested that Hmong American high school students who took at least two years of HWL have experienced more success in their high school careers than students who did not participate in the class. In exploring research question two, another quantitative finding emerged: there was a notable correlation between birthplace of the Hmong American high school students and their taking at least two years of Hmong language classes. The relationship was particularly strong in regard to female students who were born in Thailand. Seventy-one percent of the females born in Thailand in the study population opted to take two years of Hmong World Language. This pattern indicated that the Hmong World Language class may have played a particularly important role in the adaptation of the students born in Thailand to their settlement in the United States. The qualitative
responses of the former students who arrived from Thailand in the mid 2000s confirmed that the HWL program helped to address acculturation needs beyond mere academics.

Important findings for research question three regarding demographic characteristics involved groups of former student participants, those born in the United States and those born in Thailand. First, the researcher described the positive impacts of the Hmong World Language classes on Thailand-born students. The impacts included:

1) HWL classes provided social and academic networking opportunities for Thailand born students to connect with other students, especially US born Hmong American students;
2) HWL classes helped newcomer students to adapt to their new school environment and exposed them to the academic culture more effectively and respectfully; and
3) As a result, HWL classes enabled these students to accelerate the acquisition of their English language skills and academic writing skills, thus helping them to improve their overall academic performance in school.

The positive impact, on the other hand, for US-born Hmong American students were then discussed by the researcher. These students reported that:

1) HWL classes enabled the American born students to find themselves as Hmong Americans and gain confidence and pride in that identity.
2) The HWL classes also helped these students reconnect and improve their relationship with their parents, family, their elders and the Hmong community and
3) As a result of the HWL class, the American-born students also experienced academic success, including improved academic writing skills, and they came to a better understanding of their relationship with their own education and with the school itself.

The outcomes self-reported by the students were reinforced by the observations of the teachers, who noted students’ greater academic self-confidence and improved academic performance as they became involved in the HWL class.

The discussion for research question four identified some of the nonacademic consequences for Hmong American students who participated in two years of Hmong World Language classes, including personal, social and cultural consequences. A number of positive consequences were reported by the Hmong high school students who participated in the HWL classes. Students described themselves as happy and proud to have had the opportunity to participate in the HWL classes in high school. They spoke positively about having the opportunity to learn their heritage Hmong language and literature, and their satisfaction in not having to be required to learn another foreign language when English itself was already a “foreign” language to them. They also expressed satisfaction in learning about their culture and history and developing their communication and social skills with their parents and elders at home and in the community. Most importantly, they could now participate more fully with traditional cultural ceremonies and events and be more useful to their families and community.
A particularly interesting positive outcome, which both the Thailand-born and the American-born students identified, was their coming to a better understanding of the academic culture of the school and of the life skills that would enable them to solve problems in school and their personal lives. As they gained new academic, social, and life skills from HWL classes, they also gained new confidence and motivation, which enabled them to improve their academic performance in school and plan for their post-high school academic progress. These student responses seemed to partially explain the association between HWL participation and higher GPA.

The Hmong language teachers also identified nonacademic outcomes for the students in the course and for the Hmong American students in the school generally. It was striking that the teachers observed less fighting and violence among Hmong students in the school, even though not all of the Hmong students were enrolled in the class. This suggests that the presence of the class itself had some impact on the culture of the school and the actions and attitudes of the Hmong students generally.

Finally, the discussion of research question five identified the following transformational long-term (post-high school education, career, life satisfaction) consequences for these young Hmong Americans who participated for two years in the Hmong World Language class:

1. They acquired a belief that they could be successful in life.
2. They recognized that their pursuit of a successful life did not have to pull them away from their families and community.
3. They were looking ahead to a life of less suffering than their parents experienced and became more confident that they would enjoy a different and, to them a better, way of life.

4. They became optimistic that they would be able to achieve greater social and economic security and success.

5. They developed academically grounded career plans, involving fields like business and nursing, teaching, etc. Most of the focus group participants were currently attending the community college, but they had plans to transfer into a four-year degree program and beyond or to secure a respectable job.

6. They expressed a desire to give back to their community and confidence that they would be able to do so.

In conclusion, these young people had a clear vision of what they wanted to do in college and in their lives and had the confidence to believe in themselves and their ability to make their dreams come true. The prevalence of this positive vision of the future was one of the most important findings of this study. These young people did not just want academic success, but they wanted to live a better life than their parents, to be happier, and to be able to contribute more back to their community and the community at large.
Chapter 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Overview

Ntawv Hmoob

Ntawv Hmoob xwb yeej kawm tau
Vim nws kuj tsis muaj ntau
Kawm kom ntev zog mus
Koj yeej txawj paub zus

Txawm nws siv sij hawm
Los yuav tau sib zog kawm
Txawm kawm ntuj sov txog ntuj nag
Los yuav tau kawm kom tag

Ces tshuav tsis ntev lawm xwb
Koj yuav txawj cuag tej xib fwb
Txog thaum kawg
Thiaj dhau mus yog txiv neeg yawg

Yog li txhob txhawj txhob quaj
Vim ntawv Hmoob xwb yeej tsis nyuaj

Toua Vue
3/20/2004
Collection of Hmong bilingual teachers from BB High School
English Translation of Poem

Hmong Studies

Hmong language can be learned
Because it is not that much
Study a little bit longer
You will know more

It will take time
And you will have to work hard
Study from hot season to raining season
You have to finish your study

It will not be long
You will know as much as the teacher
In the end
You will become a man

Therefore don’t worry and don’t cry
Because Hmong language is not that hard

Toua Vue
3/20/2004
Collection of Hmong bilingual teachers from BB High School
Hmong American Students in the Research and in the Field – Discovering Strengths and Confronting Challenges

The purpose of this study was to examine the impacts and consequences that the high school “Hmong as World Language” courses have had on Hmong American high school students academically, socially, and emotionally in school, at home and in the community.

A mixed method was adapted for this study due to the complexity of the many dimensions of Hmong American students’ achievements in school and students’ lives that are affected by their development within the school context, the community context, and the family context and within the dynamics are the larger society. The theoretical basis of this mixed method is supported by the work of Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) and Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2010) on the appropriate methods for the study of complex social phenomena.

This study utilized three data sources: 1) student outcomes from an analysis of regularly-maintained student performance data from the ABC School District; 2) a focus group which drew upon the experiences of young Hmong Americans who have successfully completed two years of Hmong as World Language courses in high school and right after graduation from high school; and 3) interviews conducted by the researcher which drew upon the insights and experiences of two Hmong bilingual teachers who have taught Hmong as a world language courses in the BB High School in ABC School District for the past twelve and seven years. In both the case of the focus group and the interviews, since the researcher himself conducted the joint interview and
facilitated the focus group, the group dynamics of these two interactions also contributed data to the study. The researcher hoped to gain an insight into the role of Hmong as World Language courses in building academic achievement, strengthening young Hmong Americans’ connectedness with their home community, and nurturing their successful adaptation to the larger American society.

Researches on the educational experiences of Hmong American students represent a small but growing body of knowledge. The recentness of the major Hmong migrations to the United States and the extreme circumstances leading to their movement have limited the ability of American educators to learn who their Hmong students and their families really are and how to more effectively and respectfully meet their educational needs and aspirations. In order for teachers, schools, districts, and/or educational policy makers to provide quality and equitable educational opportunities and services to Hmong American students, it is imperative for them to understand the students’ unique needs and the challenges that they face in school. It is also necessary that educators take the time to encounter and learn about the strengths and resources that the Hmong American students bring to school with them from their families and their community.

The review of literature in this study presents at least an introduction to the history and traditions of the Hmong people and the journey through history that has led so many Hmong families to relocate to the United States. The more contemporary research regarding the needs, challenges, strengths and resources of Hmong American
students, their family, and community provides an essential context for exploring potential paths to success for Hmong American students academically, socially, and personally. Needs and challenges identified in the literature include:

1. School inequity
2. Unfamiliarity of educational leaders and teachers with Hmong American students and their ways of learning
3. Incompatibility of many educational program with student learning styles
4. Social dislocation arising from the refugee experience
5. Poverty
6. Challenges to internalizing academic performance skills
7. Unfamiliarity with academic language
8. Intergenerational stresses between Hmong parents and children

Finally, strengths of and resources for Hmong American students identified in the literature include:

1. Resilience in the face of extreme historical challenges
2. Existence of effective educational model for teaching Hmong American students
3. Culture capital from values expressed by Hmong family members
4. Community cultural wealth from extended families and the Hmong community
5. The personal and collective strengths derived from Hmong cultural retention
6. Cognitive tools within Hmong oral language traditions for school-based learning

7. Recognition of Hmong as a World Language and the skills learned in its formal study

One of the challenges facing Hmong American students in school has been inequity in the school environment itself. Hmong American students have suffered from misunderstanding and even mistreatment by teachers, school, and the district when they were placed in educational program(s) that did not benefit them, or when they could not access the most advanced educational programs or when their proficiency in their heritage language and cultural knowledge were not recognized as an asset. According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), “the intersection of race and property creates an analytic tool through which we can understand social (and, consequently, school) inequity” (p. 48). As discussed in Chapter 2, the “property functions of whiteness” as explained by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995, p. 48), has had negative consequences for Hmong American students.

The presence of incompatibilities in the educational programs conducted by the school and school district has hindered the academic progress of Hmong American students. Cardenas and Cardenas (1977) pointed out that such lack of compatibility was likely to result in inappropriate educational programs for language minority students. Indeed, Hmong students come to school with different cultural experience and not all
Hmong students come into the school already grounded in the particular cultural capital that schools may assume as a given for their students (Bourdieu, 1986).

Low socio-economic status and poverty among Hmong American students have had a significant impact on their academic progress and achievement. Lee (2005) reported that although some members of the Hmong American community have achieved mainstream success, many others are still living in poverty. The U.S. Census Bureau (2009) reported that 26.9% of all Hmong families and 30.3% of Hmong families with children under 18 years old are living in poverty. As discussed in Chapter 2, Vang found in 2001 that Hmong American students are mostly from a disadvantaged home environment. He also concluded that Hmong parent employment correlated with academic success for those Hmong American high school students who are doing well.

Vang (2001) reported that Hmong American high school dropouts typically said that they, in fact, liked school, but as they moved up the grade levels, they felt that they were “under-prepared” and began to fall behind academically. As a consequence, they did not know what to do or where to start. As a result, many Hmong American students become overwhelmed and often disengage academically and socially in school (Kwon, 2006). In school, most Hmong American students, even those born in the United States, have had to struggle to acquire English to levels comparable to that of native speakers of English of the same age and grade level. Indeed, English academic language deficiency continues to be one of the greatest obstacles for Hmong American students (Vang, 2001). Cummins (1984) found that even when English learners could converse easily in English,
it typically took a minimum of five years to acquire sufficient academic language to accomplish academic tasks. This pattern is certainly true for Hmong American students. According to Lee (2005), while many Hmong Americans, especially those of second-generation, are fluent in speaking English; they do not have the same level of fluency in reading and writing.

Although there are many studies regarding the positive impact that parents have on their children’s education, for Hmong parents, the painful shift to accommodate and survive in the mainstream culture has been a tremendous challenge. As a result, role switching often occurs in Hmong American families because of the parents’ struggles with the English language. Finn (1999) reported that Hmong American children often become the link between their parents and the world around them, changing the dynamics of the family structure. O’Reilly (1998) also reported that four out of five Hmong students indicated that their relationship with their parents was improving; however, five out of five students shared that at times, this relationship was strained mostly due to different perspectives and understanding of life in America. These strains eventually lead to “multi-generational households” with varying levels and degrees of assimilation or acculturation and conflicted lines of authority (O’Reilly, 1998).

While young Hmong Americans may have a more contemporary understanding of “life in America” than their parents, the American life that they adopt is not always conducive to school success. Hmong American youth are highly influenced by the popular and consumer culture of mainstream America (Lee, 2005). This phenomenon not
only places strains on intergenerational relationships, it also often results in the adoption by the youth of values that are also inconsistent with acquiring an academic focus (Conroy, 2006).

With so many conflicting cultural models already competing for their attention, Hmong American students clearly benefit from educational programs and practices that make use of their existing stores of cultural knowledge and practical skills. In fact, providing educational models which are compatible with Hmong American students’ learning styles has been identified as one of the best ways to raise their academic performance. Cardenas and Cardenas (1977) insisted that in order for minority students to perform at their peak level, the instructional program and the characteristics of the learner have to be compatible. Indeed, Krashen (1997) and McCarty (2011) found that the knowledge language minority students attain in their primary language supports the acquisition of English language skills and academic learning.

As was explored in Chapter 4, the Hmong World Language class has provided just such a compatible learning environment in which students have been able not only to formally study the Hmong language, but also to learn problem solving skills, and academic strategies to help them perform better. In the process, they have been able to incorporate cultural cues from their Hmong background into their school-based learning. This integration of the classroom study of Hmong language and culture with the cultural practices of family and community is typical of strategies recommended to teach students with a field dependent learning, a style of learning which other researchers have
associated with Hmong learners (Shade, 1997). In the focus group discussion in Chapter 4, the Hmong American students described how they were able, through the HWL class to develop skills in formal, expository writing which they later applied to assignments in English, much like Vygotsky’s neophyte, when engaged in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygosky, 1978).

The focus group participants stated that the learning skills they acquired from HWL classes were very helpful for them:

- When I took my English classes, I did not know how to write my essays. However, I thought about the lessons on how to write essays in the Hmong language classes and I used these same ideas to write my essays.

- In this way, the HWL class served as a bridge into the academic culture of the school, providing the Hmong students with some of the cultural capital other students may have brought with them from their home cultures (Bourdieu, 1974) and teaching them how to use their Hmong cultural strengths to succeed in school (Yosso, 2005).

As both the Hmong American students and their teachers reported, the Hmong World Language classes provided a means by which the community cultural wealth residing in the Hmong American families and community could strengthen the students’ skills, understanding and resilience in their American school (Yosso, 2005). Thus, the six forms of capital such as aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital played vital roles in the students’ academic performance (Auerbach, 2001; Delgado Bernal, 1997, 2001; Orellana Faulstich, 2003; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Yosso, 2005). Ngo and Lee (2007) identified...
several examples of community cultural wealth that contribute to the success of Vietnamese and Hmong students among others, including such practices as the application of concerted family and community pressure on young people to work hard and to behave appropriately. In a mutually reinforcing relationship, the cultural wealth of the Hmong community (Yosso, 2005) becomes more accessible to the Hmong students when they study HWL. As they become more proficient in the Hmong language and culture, students communicate and network with family and community members while participating in various community events. Through these interactions, they become more subject to the influence of those community values that expect them to stay in school and work hard.

This integration of greater community connectedness with the academic focus of a college-preparatory language class models the bicultural strategy of selective acculturation, in which a firm foundation in one’s home culture is associated with academic success (Boscher, 1997; Lee, 2005; McNall, et al., 1994; Ngo & Lee, 2007). The focus group participants’ experiences certainly supported these previous research findings on the effectiveness of bicultural selective acculturation. Each of them was pursuing postsecondary education either in a community college, through a 2+2 transfer academic program or in a four-year university. The strength of these bicultural young adults is all the greater given the many roadblocks that they describe having been placed in the way of their academic advancement, such as placement in inappropriate classes and lack of advisement on graduation and college enrollment requirements.
For Hmong American high school students to have the opportunity to learn about their language, culture, and history in the Hmong language class is a great example of multicultural education. Multicultural educators contend that schools and school districts have the power and the ability to create policies and curricula that address the needs of racial, ethnic and linguistic minority students such as Hmong students. In order to have a truly multicultural society, contemporary school curricula need to include the history, values, knowledge and lifeways of people of color and of women of all races and ethnicities and to acknowledge the discrepancies between the ideals of freedom and equality and realities of racism and sexism (Banks, 2006; Bennett, 2010; Nieto, 2007).

The focus group participants and the HWL teachers each provided illustrations of how the HWL classes provided opportunities for the Hmong students to explore such curricula and to form their own conclusions about the meanings of their experiences in the United States and in the global community.

The academic strengths and personal self-confidence which the focus group participants demonstrated is, in many ways, a vindication of the international consensus that members of ethnic, racial, cultural, linguistic and indigenous minorities enjoy a fundamental human right to a culturally and linguistically appropriate education. They have the right to expect their schools to incorporate into their education the resources of their home culture and language. Blanchard (1999, 2012), has reminded educators that the rights of students to expect their public schools to support education in their heritage language is an important human right under treaties and covenants ratified by the United
States. Educational practices honoring this human right turn out to be good practices, pedagogically as well, as the focus group members’ accomplishments demonstrate.

Interpretation of Findings

This study of the participation of Hmong American high school students in the Hmong World Language class has uncovered many ways in which the class served to buffer the often discordant effects of growing up fast in the society to which they or their parents had been relocated. Going to school required them at the same time to adapt to their new (or almost new) home and to address the complexity of obtaining a public education. Their education was occurring in a social milieu where they were not really understood and which they were also struggling to understand. In the HWL class, these students were able to create a synthesis of the different cultures, worlds and experiences that they inhabit.

Interpreting the Quantitative Data

The quantitative data analyses indicated that the Hmong World Language class played a positive role in the educational experience of Hmong American students, both those born in the United States (second or third generation) and those born in Thailand (first generation) (p=.007 and r=.235). The descriptive data showed that a higher proportion of students from Thailand took HWL than students born in the United States (45%, N=17 compared to 26%, N=24) and that a very high proportion of female students born in Thailand 71% (24) sought out the program. This finding suggests that the HWL
classes were a positive influence on the school experience of all of the students involved and also that it accomplished an additional purpose for those students born in Thailand. The quantitative data can tell little more than this. It cannot get inside the experience of the students to understand the ways in which taking two years of a particular language could affect multiple dimensions of their lives. To look more deeply into the students’ experience of participating in the HWL classes and their experiences in the high school generally, one must explore the meanings that arise from the qualitative analysis.

*Interpreting the Qualitative Data*

The first major finding from the qualitative data was that the effects of participation in HWL were different in some important ways for the two groups of former student participants, those born in the United States and those born in Thailand. The impact of involvement in the HWL classes reported in regard to Thailand-born students included:

1. HWL classes provided social and academic networking opportunities for Thailand born students to connect with other students, especially US born Hmong American students;
2. HWL classes helped newcomer students to adapt to their new school environment and exposed them to the academic culture more effectively and respectfully; and
3. As a result, HWL classes enabled these students to accelerate the acquisition of their English language skills and academic writing skills, thus helping them to improve their overall academic performance in school.
The impact of involvement in the HWL classes reported in regard to US-born Hmong American students included the following:

1. HWL classes enabled the American born students to find themselves as Hmong Americans and gain confidence and pride in that identity.
2. The HWL classes also helped these students reconnect and improve their relationship with their parents, family, their elders and the Hmong community and
3. As a result of the HWL class, the American-born students also experienced academic success, including improved academic writing skills and came to a better understanding of their relationship with their own education and with the school itself.

As noted in Chapter 4, these outcomes were derived both from the insights of the students and the observations of the teachers.

The second major finding from the qualitative data was the broad range of nonacademic consequences that occurred in the personal, social and educational lives of the Hmong American students who participated in two years of Hmong World Language classes. As reported in the analysis of the focus group data in Chapter 4, the students expressed satisfaction with learning about their culture and history; they were pleased with their improved communication and social skills with their parents and elders at home and in the community. Most importantly, they were very pleased that they could now participate more fully with traditional cultural ceremonies and events and demonstrate a greater usefulness for their families and community.
In addition, both the American born and Thailand born students reported that their interactions with peers and teachers in the HWL class helped them to better understand the rules of the game involved in completing their high school education and preparing to enter college. The Hmong language teachers’ observations supported the students’ own experiences regarding nonacademic outcomes from the existence of the program, both for the students in the course and for the Hmong American students in the school generally. It was striking to this researcher that the teachers insisted that the presence of the HWL program contributed to less fighting and violence among Hmong students and between Hmong students and other ethnic groups in the school, even though not all of the Hmong students were enrolled in the class. This observation suggests that the presence of the class itself had some impact on the culture of the school and the actions and attitudes of the Hmong students generally.

Finally, the research findings pointed to other long-term transformational consequences for students who completed two years of the HWL program, such as students’ pursuit of post-high school education, their planning for their future careers, and an improvement in their overall life satisfaction. For example:

1. They acquired a belief that they could be successful in life.
2. They recognized that their pursuit of a successful life did not have to pull them away from their families and community
3. They were looking ahead to a life of less suffering than their parents experienced and became more confident that they would enjoy a different and, to them better, way of life.

4. They became optimistic that they would be able to achieve greater social and economic security and success

5. They developed academically grounded career plans, involving fields like business and nursing, teaching, etc.

6. They expressed a desire to give back to their community and confidence that they would be able to do so

Most of the focus group participants were currently attending a community college, but they had plans to transfer into a four-year degree and beyond or to secure a respectable professional credential and many of them intended to pursue a career, which would benefit their community as well as themselves.

In conclusion, for these young Hmong Americans knowing what they want to do in college and in their lives and having the confidence and the determination to build their dreams into realities has been one of the most important outcomes of their participation in the HWL program. As noted in Chapter 4, the young people expressions of confidence and a combination of practicality and idealism in their plans for their future. This reflects one of the most important findings of this study – the young people’s development of academically grounded and culturally grounded resilience as they face the rest of their lives.
Implications of the Study

The Hmong American high school students who participated in the Hmong as World Language classes have accomplished at least two important purposes: 1) they learned to navigate their relationship with the school and with American educational expectations and structures and 2) they reinforced or rediscovered who they were as Hmong people and as Hmong Americans. The chapter will now explore the implications of both of these accomplishments.

Academic Implications of HWL Classes

The young Hmong Americans who participated in this study have learned some ways to navigate their relationship with their schools (including now their postsecondary schools) and with American educational expectations and structures. Both the focus group members and teachers reported that even though the Hmong American high school students had encountered many challenges in high school such as not having the right courses or not always having quality teachers, they learned how to work with the system and, when necessary, struggle against the system to overcome their problems so they could graduate from high school. For example, through the HWL courses, the students were able to meet a graduation requirement without having to learn a third language. Through the dialogue in the classes with their teachers and their peers, they learned about requirements for their graduation that had not been adequately explained to them and then developed strategies to meet those requirements so they graduated on time anyhow.
They learned how to conduct academic research and writing and presentation—originally in Hmong, and yet able to be carried over into other classes, including English. The young Hmong American high school students who participated in the HWL had access to the linguistic capital of their heritage language to help them access high level academic and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style (Orellana Faulstich, 2003). The experiences of these students confirmed Vang’s (1998) finding that there is a moderate correlation between cultural retention and students’ academic achievement. The students’ experiences in building transferable academic skills through the study of their home language parallel findings from research on other language groups, such as Native Americans, that a thorough grounding in one’s home language will in fact facilitate acquisition of academic language and academic writing skills (McCarty, 2011; Shade, 1997).

The skills in working the system of schooling the focus group students acquired while participating in the HWL courses are a resource for them now as they must navigate their postsecondary educational path. Because of the course choices that were made for them by counselors at their high school, some of these students who have planned to obtain their baccalaureate degree have been required to start their college education in the community college, and even to make up some of the prerequisites they were missing. Both the Hmong language teachers and focus group report that these students have learned about the formal and technical requirements of completing one level of schooling (high school) and entering postsecondary education. In the focus
group, the participants talked about what they were going to have to do now to pursue the college education they actually aspire to, not just the one they have started with. Those same skills they learned in high school and practiced to assure their graduation will serve them well as they push forward with their academic plans and dreams. These students have learned to use navigational capital to maneuver through educational institutions (Auerbach, 2001; Delgado Bernal, 1997, 2001; Orellana Faulstich, 2003; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Yosso, 2005).

Implications of the Hmong World Language Program for the Hmong Community

The Hmong as World Language program was developed to address not only an educational need of Hmong high school students but also in the hopes of helping to heal an open wound in the Hmong community in Sacramento – the pain in so many Hmong families as they felt their children slipping away from them into a frightening and incomprehensible world of violence and alienation. Teaching the Hmong language to Hmong adolescents was part of the effort to call them back into their culture, their families and their community. The next section is an insider’s story, the researcher’s story, of the community turmoil that gave rise to the original Hmong language classes at BB High School.

When Clan Brother Killed Clan Brother – the Origins of the Hmong as a World Language Program

Both focus group participants and teachers agreed that the Hmong as World Language classes helped the student participants to acquire a sense of who they were and where they were – an important step in acculturation/adjustment to the many faces of
their Hmong American reality. This has been a cherished hope and dream of the students’ parents and elders and their community, who have seen so much dislocation in their lives and in the lives of their children. Since coming to the United States as former allies with the US during the Vietnam War, now turned into refugees, the Hmong American parents, elders, and community have endured many tragedies (Vang, 2006, 2008, 2010; Yang, 2003). Many of the second and third generation of Hmong American middle and high school age children were lost and their alienation created one of the saddest problems for Hmong families and communities across the US. Many Hmong in the United States considered this tragedy as the second worst catastrophe in their lives, next only to the “Secret War” in Laos for Hmong elders. This researcher listened to and participated in many heartbreaking and frustrated conversations with elders and community leaders at the traditional Hmong funeral ceremonies held after the deaths of Hmong high school students who were shooting each other in the community. Sometimes brothers and/or cousins killed each other because they belonged to different gang groups – a shock to all Hmong Americans across the nation because, in the Hmong cultural context, it was not supposed to happen. In near despair, the elders wondered why their children had come into the world only to kill each other in the streets of an unfamiliar city:

Peb cov tub uas ua laib no mas, kuv xav hais tias ntshe Ua Neeb Kho yuav tau no tiam sis txawm Ua Neeb Kho tas los yeej pab tsis tau thiab (Our sons that became gang members [referring to causing troubles in the Hmong community], I was hoping that having a Shaman to perform soul calling ritual would help, but it did not help either).
Sometimes the deaths involved innocent family members who were killed because gang activity happened around them. These stories would dominate the conversations at the eating table due to the fear that this could happen again and that the community could do nothing about it. In their despair, some grieving community members expressed a bitter hopelessness about the ability of local law enforcement to protect the Hmong community and about the futures facing their angry, alienated children:

Yog peb Ua Neeb Kho los tsis tau thiab tej nom tswv los pab tsis tau lawm ces ntshe yuav tsim tau muab lawv xa coj mus nrog lawv tua rog xwb lau (If we could not resolve these problems through Shaman soul calling ceremony and we know that our local government could not help us, then we might as well send them to fight a war outside of the country).

Cas cov tub ceev xwm no tsis muab lawv ntes coj mus tua rog lawm tim Nplog lawv thiaj tsis tau tsim teeb meem rau peb? Tus twg tsis mloog lus ces muab xa kiag mus lawm tiv! (How come the police did not send them to fight the war in Laos so they could not create trouble for us? Anyone that does not listen to us, we should send him or her there!).

Of course, they did not literally mean or expect that the alienated Hmong American young people should all be sent to die in a war. However, they were hurting; they did not know how to stop the killing in the community and they were frightened.

The community dislocation, anger and fear, recalled by this researcher from too many painful conversations in too many shattered homes reached a near fever pitch in the mid-1990s. A desire to build some resource for Hmong adolescents so that they could connect with the strength of their Hmong identity which had carried the researcher and his parents and his family through war and exile, led to one more relocation, this time
from the elementary classroom in the North Sacramento to a high school in South Sacramento. There, conditions proved right to begin a small effort toward educational change and cultural survival – the establishment of a Hmong language class which eventually became the Hmong as World Language sequence of four levels of language instruction to provide a means for Hmong American high school students to begin the journey back home to who they are.

*Implications of HWL Classes for Family Interconnections*

The young Hmong Americans in this study acknowledged in the focus group that they now are more able to tap into the family and community cultural capital resources they need in order to successfully pursue their dreams (Yosso, 2005). In the Hmong culture, the immediate family members, the clan, and/or extended family all play a very important role in the upbringing of children in the community (Cha, 2010). Since resettlement in the US, the loss of Hmong language and cultural knowledge has been the occasion of hurtful losses of connection within families and the Hmong American community and has contributed to the problems discussed above.

When the young Hmong Americans were describing what they now considered their bad attitude toward their parents and how they now felt they had treated their parents due to these misunderstandings, they were saddened. Both the Hmong World Language teachers and the focus group of young Hmong Americans described how the Hmong language class had played an important role in bridging the gap between young Hmong Americans, the lost generations, and their parents and their community. Values
and priorities of the Hmong families had collided with those of the American mainstream culture, making communication between children and parents challenging and adaptation to life in the United States difficult (Conroy, 2006). The Hmong as World Language classes provided opportunities for Hmong families and community to heal from these misunderstanding.

**Impact of HWL Program on Cultural Understanding within the Group**

The focus group participants and the teachers made many statements and observations stressing how the HWL students gained a greater understanding and respect for their traditions. This is important because the Hmong American culture is what defines the Hmong people. Their culture is their strength because it comprises their hopes, views, values, loyalties and frames their fears or worries. Hmong culture is described by Conroy (2006) as relationship-oriented, built upon group accomplishment and harmony, as valuing helpfulness and interdependence, as social, featuring implicit nonverbal communication and emotional control, as treating time flexibly, and involving extended family decision making. The students’ and teachers’ stories suggest that having a better or restored knowledge of Hmong cultural traditions has enabled HWL students to access the family and community resources. Competence in the use of these resources has made them better able to be successful in school and is contributing to their sense of life success as well (Yosso, 2005).

If, as this finding suggests, the young Hmong Americans who integrate their home and school cultures, come to participate more fully in the cultural activities and
traditions of their community, a long-held dream of their parent’s and grandparents’
generations may be closer to realization and the terrible fear that the generations would
be pulled apart from each other may finally be eased. Hmong have tremendous respect
for spirituality, family life, and tradition. Cultural Survival in this case is associated with
the community members’ sense of wellbeing and that is associated with their confidence
that the younger generation will carry on their traditions of sharing and caring for one
another (Cha, 2010).

The students’ statements, some playful, some serious, raised the possibility that at
least some young Hmong Americans are rediscovering in their Hmong language studies
skills for wooing the opposite sex through poems and “pov pob” (tossing balls) during
the Hmong New Year celebration and through mastery of the Hmong wedding protocol,
an important piece of knowledge for impressing the parents of a potential spouse. The
Hmong language teachers reported that the Hmong New Year celebration has continued
to attract more Hmong American high school students since the HWL program began.
These students have asked for permission to wear Hmong clothes and to participate with
the event at school, even some Hmong students who were not themselves students in the
HWL class. According to these teachers, the other Hmong students saw how the HWL
students were enjoying their involvement with each other in the songs, exchanges of
poetry and such and they wanted to join. The HWL students were not ashamed of who
they were and did not have problems celebrating their tradition. They were having fun.
Fun is contagious.
In their oral cultural tradition, young Hmong men and women usually express their romantic or passionate thoughts and feeling about each other through “Kvw Txhiaj”, “Lus Taum”, or “Lus Paj Huam” (poetry) or musical instruments such as “Raj Pum Liv” (flute) or “Qeej” (Hmong wind pipe instrument). Furthermore, as a part of growing up to be an adult in the Hmong culture, young Hmong women and men are encouraged to learn and participate with the wedding ceremony and/or celebrations of other wedded couples before they get married themselves. This is more like a training and test for them. To be able to recite verses or poems for variety occasions has been a part of the cultural norms in Hmong society for a long time.

The interest expressed by some of the participants in the focus group in learning more about these customs of courtship and family life reinforces the observations of the Hmong language teachers that participation in HWL has generated greater interest on the part of at least some young people in participating more fully in these important life passages. As one young man said:

This class helped me to communicate with my mom and my dad. And also identifying certain cultural steps of a wedding and the procedures that the OG, elders, have to go through in order to get the wedding to complete.

Building Confidence through HWL Participation

The statements and the demeanor of the focus group participants suggest that they feel more confident and optimistic about their life and future. Both the reports from the teachers and focus group described that once Hmong students knew their identity and became more proficient in their heritage language and culture, they became more
successful in school, despite the fact that the school environment is not necessarily aligned with their community values. Perhaps as a consequence of their greater ability to bridge the differences among their various communities of interest, the HWL students also reported feeling more confident and optimistic about their future. These young Hmong Americans have rediscovered their connection to a brave and hardworking people--their parents and elders (Murai, 2010). Historically and politically, as a minority and as political refugees, the Hmong people have been oppressed, pushed around, discriminated against and betrayed for a long time. Nonetheless, they have survived (Murai, 2010) – an outcome which has required all their strength and courage and skill in overcoming challenges.

In learning about their history and the struggles of their parents and grandparents, the students in the HWL classes have found some powerful role models in their own tradition for their own struggles to survive as authentic and contemporary Hmong Americans. This finding also indicates that young Hmong Americans have benefited from the aspirational capital, which refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even when facing real challenges in life (Gándara, 1982, 1995). According to Gándara, this resiliency is notable in families who allow themselves and their children to dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances, often without the objective means to attain those goals. As Hmong American students grow more confident that their Hmong roots and their educational and career aspirations can support each other
rather than compete for their attention, they are able to benefit from the collective resiliency of their families and their community as they pursue their own goals.

In short, the Hmong American students may be developing their own strategies for adopting a bicultural existence in which they refuse to abandon either where they come from or where they are going. Ngo and Lee (2007) point out that a growing body of research such as Gibson (1988), Portes and Rumbaut (2001), and Zhou and Bankston (1998) suggests Hmong students who are bicultural are the most successful. This also suggests that Hmong American students who adopt a strategy of accommodation without assimilation tend to be more successful and excel in school academically and in their new country (McNall et al., 1994).

The reports from both the teachers and focus group interviews pointed out that once the young Hmong Americans finish college, they intend to return to the community to be role models for the younger generation and to help members in the community. These young Hmong Americans are becoming more consciously aware of the needs of their family and the community. Historically and culturally, the Hmong people did not have a financial social security program for their parents or elders. The only social security plan they had was their children. The Hmong people believed that it is the parents’ responsibility to take care of their children when they were young and vulnerable, but on the other hand, when the parents are old and cannot take care of themselves, it is the now their children’s turn to take care of them:

Ua qoob ua loo los npaj rau yav thaum tshaib
Tu tub tu kiv los npaj rau yav thaum laus
(Work hard to prepare crops so you don’t go hungry
Raise children to help you when you are old).
(A popular Hmong proverb usually cite by elders during a funeral ritual)

Thus, the interest expressed by students from the HWL classes in participating in community life is welcome news and is very important for the family and community. Because now one of their goals is to give back to the community, they may be motivated to work harder in school so they can help others in the long run. This supports Cha’s conclusion (2010) that the survival of Hmong family and community depends largely on sharing and caring for one another through the contributions of many within the whole family system. Contributions that young Hmong Americans give back to the community also confirm the strong core belief of the Hmong American parents and community members that education is a route out of poverty. This belief represents another source of strength and/or community cultural wealth (Ngo & Lee, 2007; Yosso, 2005).

From the accounts of the Hmong World Language teachers and the young people themselves, the author of this study feels a growing confidence that the deeper goals of the Hmong as World Language program are beginning to bear some fruit. Young Hmong Americans have at least one path, in at least one high school to acquire greater fluency in their heritage language and a deeper understanding of their history, including their individual family’s history. Thus, at least some Hmong students are being provided, through their public education, with tools for accessing the healing resources within their culture.
These young Hmong Americans have acquired cultural knowledge that carries a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998, 2002). They have reconnected with the familial capital that the many generations in their family yearn to share with them. This form of cultural wealth engages a commitment to community well-being and expands the concept of family to include a broader understanding of kinship. Furthermore, the many layers of identity which these young people incorporate into their sense of who they are also suggests that they are becoming skilled in the practices of accommodation and acculturation without assimilation (Lee, 2001; Moua, 2007; Vang, 1998, 2006). The students in this study have demonstrated that they and their younger brothers and sisters can and will do their part if they are provided with the tools and with the knowledge. The question now becomes: What must their teachers, their principals and their school district leaders do in order to make sure that these young people receive the tools and the nourishment which they need and which they deserve?

Implications for Transformational Educational Leadership

The experiences of the students in the Hmong as World Language class and the observations of their teachers raise questions about the quality and relevance of the education which Hmong American students receive through the standard curriculum of the schools where they seek to become educated. They also point to choices embedded in the operation of the education programs at all grade levels which have consequences for
Hmong students that are too often not acknowledged by the educators who bear responsibility for these choices. This section will point to some of these questions, choices and consequences in order to identify some of the entry points for transformative educational change that could benefit Hmong American students.

*Implications for Educational Rigor and Relevance*

The students in this study report that they often felt that because of their language learner status, they were assigned to classes lacking rigorous content. The complaints about the SDAIE classes point to this problem. This raises many questions. Are students being assigned to classes which they have already mastered because of carelessness in advisement? Or, are students who are otherwise intelligent and knowledgeable but who possibly do need help with the development of English language literacy being subjected to classes which lack rigor because of an unacknowledged stereotype that English learners are less competent learners of academic content? The content of their SDAIE classes these students describe do not appear, at least from the students’ accounts of their experience, to reflect high expectations for these students in regard to the content of their learning. After all, these students not only sought to become English language fluent, but also to become college ready by the time they graduated from high school.

*Implications for Advisement, Counseling and Mentorship*

Several of the students in this study, including the English-speaking Hmong students born in the United States described their frustration in their senior year when they learned that despite all their time in high school, they had not taken the correct
required courses for high school graduation and/or for the “A through G” prerequisites for the UC and CSU systems. This researcher is familiar with this experience since he has seen other Hmong American students face this incomprehensible disappointment, sometimes at the very end of their senior year. The students in the focus group who had faced this challenge managed, despite the odds, to graduate anyhow by taking as many as eight classes in one term to fit all the requirements for graduation into their schedule. Even then, one student blamed the choice of courses she had been assigned by counselors and the corrective actions she had been required to take for the fact that she did not qualify to apply to the CSU or UC systems.

The HWL class evidently provided a place where these students could, in the context of discussions with other students and their teachers, learn about the graduation requirements and college entrance requirements. As one of the initiators of the HWL program, the researcher knows through his own knowledge that HWL program was never expected to substitute for appropriate advisement of students. It is vital for the counselors or designated school administrators to be able to monitor the progress of all students to ensure that when the students lack any of the required courses for graduation that they take immediate action to work with the student to enroll them in these course(s). It is also a simple matter of respect to ask students what their post-high-school plans and dreams may be and to help them to choose appropriate courses to support those ambitions. Students and their family should not have to wait until their senior year or the
last week before their graduation to find out that they do not have the required classes for 
graduation or to go to the college that the student wanted to attend.

*Implications for Organization and Lines of Responsibility*

Students in this study report that they had to find out for themselves about the 
courses that they needed to take late during their high school years. Sometimes they did 
not learn of these requirements until their senior year, when it was almost too late to meet 
them. This meant in some cases those EL students who already faced multiple challenges 
had to take an overload of classes in order to graduate on time. Some questions arise such 
as whether the school had any monitoring system to ensure that no students fell through 
the cracks. How do the school leaders know that each high school student is making 
progress toward a timely graduation? How do they align students’ programs not only 
with the high school graduation requirements, but also with the students’ college 
aspirations? Who even asks these students what their aspirations are?

A high school campus has an average of two thousand students. Who works with 
individual students and parents so they know how to prepare for the many choices they 
will have to make about their progress through school? Who sets up and oversees the 
system (if there is indeed a system) through which students are advised and guided 
toward high school completion and college admissions? One of the best ways for parents 
and students to become involved with school activities is to know the important things 
that they should be doing for high school graduation and for college entrance. Parental
involvement will increase as a result of effective mentoring and outreach to both parents and students about the issues that matter most to them.

Curricular Implications

This study indicates that the Hmong as World Language courses in BB High School have benefited young Hmong Americans in this study academically, socially, and personally. However, many other Hmong high school students did not have the opportunity to study Hmong because their home school did not have HWL classes. These classes might have prevented some students from failing or dropping out of school, if they had the chance to take HWL classes.

Despite the positive outcomes associated with the HWL program, however, the benefits appear to have come a little late to positively influence the students’ CST scores in ELA and Math. As discussed in Chapter 4, formal instruction in the heritage language cannot have as great an impact as it might on student achievement in academic subjects when it begins so late in their school career. The sooner Hmong American students have the opportunity to participate in Hmong language classes, the better it will be for them. It is possible that schools and districts can offer appropriate Hmong language courses or Hmong-based courses in appropriate core subjects at elementary and/or middle schools where there is enough community interest. In some cases, the interest might justify an entire Hmong infusion program. In others, where there were fewer Hmong students or parents preferred a different model, schools might experiment with a variety of
alternative formats for building students’ competence in decoding language meaning and
structure in Hmong as they also learn to decode meaning and structure in English.

Implications for Community Connections

The focus group students reported that the HWL class helped them to become
more connected with their community. The quantitative data indicated that these students
achieved higher GPAs than similar students who did not take two years of HWL. Thus,
the heightened community connectedness appears to have been associated with positive
academic outcomes. In addition, the Hmong language teachers reported that Hmong-on-
Hmong violence was greatly reduced when the HWL program became a part of the
school culture, even though many Hmong students were not enrolled in the program.
Clearly, the extended family and Hmong community is a resource, which can contribute
to resiliency, academic success and social development. The question is, what else
beyond offering HWL can and should the school district and its schools at all levels be
doing to tap into these important sources of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005)?

The benefits of being enfolded in a connected and supportive community continue
long beyond the high school years. The findings of this study on the role of community
connectedness in helping young Hmong Americans to navigate their path into a
productive adulthood have implications for the Hmong community in Sacramento (and
other locations) as well as for the school systems. Community members need to engage
in some deep conversations with each other about the journeys their children are taking
into adulthood and about the ways in which the community can strengthen its members
and families to support the young people in this journey.

Recommendations

A number of changes in practice are called for if Hmong American students in the
public schools of Sacramento (or any other city in any other state) are to receive the full
benefits of a culturally competent, academically rigorous public education. Some of these
changes are listed in this section as recommendations for further action.

Recommendations for Further Action

a. School or district representatives need to provide orientation and/or
workshops for incoming ninth graders and their parents in the languages
spoken and understood by the parents and students that explain the sequence
of courses like mathematics, English, etc., the course requirements and other
requirements for high school graduation and the course requirements for
matriculation to the various public colleges and universities. These materials
should also be provided in written handouts translated into the various
languages spoken by the families of the students. Similar orientation activities
and events need to be incorporated into middle schools as well.

b. Expand the Hmong as World Language program to additional high schools in
the district, initiate it in other districts which serve Hmong communities and
develop strategies so that students in high schools which do not offer HWL
classes may participate in such classes at whatever site they are offered without undue difficulty. It was notable from the data provided by the school district that the majority of all Hmong students taking HWL courses were already attending BB High School. While it was allowable for students from the other high schools to come to BB High School for the HWL courses, very few were able to do so. The fact that some students from other high schools were willing to face the problems with transportation to BB High School for the HWL program shows that there is an interest in this program beyond BB High School. Students in other schools should have the same opportunity to include these courses in their regular schedule.

c. Explore what possibilities may exist for making more effective use of developmental Hmong language programs at earlier grade levels, including preschool, elementary and middle schools. It was notable in this study that despite the fact that the students in the HWL class showed a positive correlation between taking the class and their overall GPA, this correlation did not result in a positive correlation with the ELA scores on the CST. As noted in the study analysis, this was not a surprising outcome since the students did not have access to HWL courses until they entered high school. Indeed, some took these classes in their junior and senior years. For Hmong language development to build and support the acquisition of English language development and other academic subject development, students from Hmong
speaking families need to have access to quality learning in the Hmong language from the beginning of their schooling (McCarty, 2011).

d. Develop curricula and courses of study for high school students, particularly EL students who are college bound which incorporate SDAIE learning strategies into core classes or incorporate core subjects into SDAIE classes so that newcomer students and other high school EL students can progress through the general required courses for high school graduation and complete the appropriate A-G college preparation for enrollment in the CSU and UC systems.

e. Provide Hmong as World Language competency challenge tests for any students at any school site who are proficient in Hmong. This is no substitute for offering the full sequence of HWL courses at more high schools. It would, however, spare bilingual, biliterate Hmong students from being compelled to complete the study of a third language in order to meet the high school graduation requirements.

f. High schools need to develop agreed upon protocols for writing expository papers which can be used across subject areas. These protocols and strategies need to be actively taught to students either in their middle school English classes or as one of the first content areas that they master in high school. The focus group students talked about how helpful the HWL class was in teaching them how to do academic writing and academic research. It is fortunate that
they learned these skills somewhere. However, these requirements should have been a consistent part of the instruction in their English classes and in their other academic classes so that the lesson was reinforced. This is particularly important in preparing students to succeed in college, since so many college freshmen end up in remedial English classes because they lack these skills.

g. High schools need to create connections between their capstone experience classes, like the Senior Project, their service learning classes and other cross-disciplinary courses and assignments on the one hand and courses such as the HWL courses on the other (this would be beneficial in courses involving other community-based languages as well). These connections would allow the HWL teachers to help students explore their home community’s cultural wealth and incorporate this community-based knowledge into credit-generating courses and projects beyond the HWL class itself. Such intercurricular connections would provide the students with opportunities for more richly developed projects, service activities and interactive learning opportunities. They would also help to bridge the divide between the Hmong community and other linguistic and cultural minority communities and the schools so that parents and community leaders could contribute actively to their children’s educational success by sharing their cultural knowledge and community resources and needs with the young people.
h. Sources of funding, both public and private need to be identified to support the establishment of scholarships for Hmong students to go to college to pursue a teaching credentials which authorize them to teach Hmong language and history.

i. A Hmong Center should be established as a part of the parent engagement program in this and other school districts with sizeable Hmong populations to truly welcome parents into a greater involvement with the school district and with their children’s education and to provide a resource to resolve students’ academic and social emotional issues. Such a Center could also become a cultural learning center where educators and members of the larger community could be invited to meet and learn more about their Hmong neighbors and where Hmong community members could be invited to share with each other and to learn about the schools their children are attending, to improve their own English language skills and to learn about the political and educational structures and processes which affect their lives and their children.

j. An awareness should be cultivated in the schools themselves of the presence of Hmong American students, who bring with them unique linguistic backgrounds, cultural characteristics, learning styles, worldviews and aspirations. This recommendation would require that the school district and its schools engage in a variety of programmatic and staffing initiatives:
i. Provide professional development for teachers about Hmong culture and learning styles

ii. Hire staff, including front office staff, who can communicate with Hmong parents and community members

iii. Incorporate Hmong history and culture into other appropriate courses within the school curriculum such as social studies and/or history. (California Assembly Bill AB78)

Recommendations for Further Research

This study is only one small piece of research. It touches upon only a few of the strengths, needs, resources, and longings of the Hmong community and their children for an appropriate, culturally respectful education in one public school in one school district in California. So much more needs to be learned to prepare educators and schools to meet the legitimate expectations of the Hmong community.

a. Conduct a longitudinal study of all incoming Hmong ninth graders beginning in the first year in high school enrollment and continuing for at least six years in order to know how many dropped out, transferred or graduated from high school

b. Compare Hmong students who took HWL and other world language courses in regard to their academic, social, and personal success in high school and post secondary school and their degree of integration into the Hmong American community.
c. Follow high school students who completed the two year of Hmong as World Language all the way through college to see how many graduate from college and what career and life choices they make during their productive adult lives.

d. Look for examples of schools throughout the United States that are showing high levels of academic success and language retention among their Hmong students. Study what these trailblazer schools (if they can be found) are doing that contributes to such positive outcomes.

e. Undertake cross-cultural and cross-national studies of the education of Hmong children in various part of the world, including not only the “Western” nations to which so many have dispersed, but also the countries where their clan relatives have remained such as Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, China to share and learn about effective teaching strategies, learning styles, etc. and to gain a greater understanding of the many dimensions of this widely dispersed and highly resilient people.

f. Any educator or concerned neighbor within a neighborhood with one or more Hmong families could conduct a little “neighborliness” research by stopping by, introducing themselves and saying hello. Then see what follows.

Researcher’s Reflection on the Meaning of this Work

Qhov muaj qhia txog hais lus, sau ntawv, thiab nyeem ntawv Hmoob, keeb kwm Hmoob, thiab kev lis kev cai Hmoob nyob rau hauv lub tsev qhia ntawv high school yog
ib qhov uas pab tau Hmong cov tub ntxhais kawm ntawv kom lawv kawm tau ntawv zoo, txawj ntse, xyaum ua tau neeg zoo, thiab muaj pee xwm paub npaj lawv lub neej yav pem suab. Qhov ntawm no yog ib txoj kev zoo yuav los pab tau cov tub cov ntxhais hluas Hmoob, cov niam cov txiv, thiab lawv lub zej lub zos kom lawv txoj kev txom nyem ntxhov plawv ploj mus. Yog koog tsev qhia ntawv twg muaj Hmoob, tsev qhia ntawv yuav tsum tau nrhiav kev qhia txog Hmoob lub neej rau me nyuam Hmoob.

Thaum twg yog tsev qhia ntawv tsis kam nrog koom tes, Hmoob sawv daws yuav tsum tau mus siv zog hais kom hnyav kom lawv qhia vim qhov no yog ib qho uas pab tau me nyuam Hmoob zoo heev.

Ntxiv mus, thaum ib lub tsev qhia ntawv twg nrhiav kev pab los rau Hmoob cov tub ntxhais hluas ntawm lawv txoj kev kawm thiab lwm yam teeb meem lawv muaj, tsev qhia ntawv yuav tsum tau nrhiav cov kev pab kom txhawb nqa tau lawv mus kom ntev ntev ob peb lub xyoos xws li ntiav neeg Hmoob los ua hauj lwm nrog lawv los yog muab Hmoob tej txuj ci thiab tswv yim zoo coj los siv pab lawv. Thaum twg muaj teeb meem tshwm sim thiaj li yuav daws tau. Cov kev pab tau tham los saum no, tsev qhia ntawv yuav tsum tau sab laj thiab koom tes ua nrog Hmoob, vim Hmoob yeej muaj tswv yim thiab dag zog yuav pab tau me nyuam Hmoob. Yog tsev qhia ntawv tsis yeem ua raws cov tswv yim tau tham los saum no, yog lawv xav kav qhov ncaj—lam lees kawm me me kom tias paub thiab txawj qhia rau me nyuam Hmoob xwb no ces yuav zoo tsis kawg thiab yuav pab tsis tau lawv kom lawv txawj tiag tiag.
Hmong as World Language courses have emerged as a win-win program. Students have achieved academically, found the energy to plan for a future as educated professionals and have revitalized their connections with their families, culture and community all at the same time. This is a strong, positive and healing experience for Hmong youngsters, parents, and their community. Hmong as a language of study needs to be a part of the education system in any region where numbers of Hmong American families live. School districts need to make it available, but if they do not take the initiative, Hmong Americans need to demand the kind of education that their children deserve.

Furthermore, when a school prepares to address the academic, social, and/or emotional needs of Hmong American students, it is important for the school to look for long-term solutions such as hiring a full-time Hmong staff or building Hmong content into the educational program at every appropriate point as a part of an ongoing program to enable the school to address these issues as they arise and as they develop. Such program should be developed in partnership with the Hmong community in order to tap into the family and community cultural wealth and resources. A two-hour workshop on Hmong culture and language professional development for teachers is not an adequate response.

The Researcher’s Personal Reflection
I had never thought of becoming a schoolteacher and school administrator until I met many hardworking and wonderful teachers and school administrators in North
Sacramento where I worked as a Hmong Bilingual Teacher Assistant. It was not until many of the teachers noticed that I had a natural ability to teach and work with students, that they encouraged me to go back to school to become a teacher. I went back to college on the school district’s internship and came back to teach for the school district. During my first year of teaching, I was nominated as Teacher of the Year by the North Sacramento Elementary School District. I had wonderful working experience and great memories of working with teachers and students in the district. I had worked hard to establish a great relationship with students, school and district staff, parents, and the school community.

I did not know that I would leave that school district until I learned from so many members of the Hmong community about the grave problems that the Hmong community had at the high school levels. The information I gathered from students, parents, and community members indicated that we had major crises at the high school level, especially, a high school that had a large Hmong student population. Students were not only facing gang violence at the community and school, but they were experiencing racial discrimination from students and adults as well. In 1994, we did not have any Hmong high school teachers in Sacramento. So even though I knew I did not want to leave my teaching position in North Sacramento, I knew I had to do it. I felt very guilty and sad for leaving the elementary school where I had worked for four years as a bilingual instructional assistant and two years as a teacher because the district had supported me so much. However, I was not afraid at all; my heart was pounding, but with deep concern at
the desperate situation facing Hmong high school students and their families. At the same time, I was excited about what I knew that I needed to do at BB High School. I knew exactly what I needed to do to help the school.

BB High School and ABC School District did not recruit or have any teaching positions open, but I met with the school Principal, whom I shall call Harold Gray, and pointed out the challenges that he had and told him that he should hire me. He did. My many roles as a first generation Hmong political refugee immigrating to the United States, as an English Learner in high school, and as a trained school teacher meant that I understood the challenges that these Hmong high school students were encountering (Murai, 2010). As soon as I was hired, with the approval of the school Principal and school district, I started working on a long-term program for the school and the district.

As I reflect now, I think that Mr. Gray*, the African American school Principal at BB High School was a great school leader. He served as a visionary, well trained and was prepared to take a chance if it might benefit his students. Mr. Gray shared my vision and he did whatever he could to support a program embracing the needs of Hmong students. Without him, I would not have been hired.

The very first Hmong language course of study was developed in the summer of 1995 and was offering for Hmong high school students in fall 1995 as elective credits for general high school graduation requirement. My life experience of facing racial and ethnic discrimination and hatred from individuals and/or institutions emerged during my first experiences in the national education system in Laos, of being a refugee and ethnic
minority and my trained profession as an educator, convinced me that one of the best ways to overcome all these problems in the school and school community was to first teach students about themselves and then to introduce the Hmong culture, history, and language to the other ethnic groups who also shared the school and the community. I became very disappointed over time to realize that the school, an educational institution that presumes to teach these very fundamental and important concepts for students, did not do so. Instead, the schools and district spent a large amount of their budget on law enforcement, hiring police officers to keep the various ethnicities from hurting each other and little or no money to teach them to respect and value each other.

There were many challenges to get a Hmong language studies program started. First, it was not easy to write the first Hmong course of study. Hmong has a very strong oral tradition so there were limited written materials that I could use for the curriculum. However, I was creative and was able to create assignments in which students would go back to their community to talk to their parents and/or elders to complete their assignments. Sometimes, I would invite elders from the community to talk to the students. Thus, the curriculum was authentic and worked well for students. The second challenge was to get the district approval for the courses of study. The district rejected the Hmong language courses many times as a part of the regular curriculum because they assumed that the Hmong courses of study did not meet the state “foreign language” standards and that no one in the school and community would want to take the classes. I clarified to the district that it was not fair for the district to use the state standards as an
excuse for not adopting the Hmong courses of study because the state had never been involved with the Hmong language before. As soon as I made the announcement of the Hmong class to the students, 200 students signed up for the class the first day. As a result, the district decided to approve the Hmong courses of study.

However, the most challenging task for me was finding a state certified Hmong speaker and writer as a single subject teacher to teach the courses. There was no University that would offer a B.A. degree in Hmong language or studies and there was no State test available for teaching Hmong language so teachers could take the state examination. For many years, the district would have to waive the certification requirement for this course. The Hmong community brought this concern to the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing and pointed out that the state needed to address this problem. As a result, in the mid 2000s, state SB 1209 (Chap. 517, Stats. 2006) was passed. This bill offered the California Subject Examination for Teachers (CSET) for other languages such as Hmong, Cambodian and other minority languages.

It took more than ten years and the hard work and commitment of many Hmong educators in the Central Valley in California from the summer of 1995 to the completion of the development of the CSET, the Hmong language certification and district adoption of the four levels of Hmong as World Language courses of study. In the end, it was an effort of the entire Hmong community including its most educated members that brought about this necessary change. I have learned that creating something like this for the first time, especially, when your language, culture, or history, has not been perceived as
important, can be very difficult. As Yosso (2005) challenged the educational
gatekeepers:

So, are there forms of cultural capital that marginalized groups bring to the

table that traditional cultural capital theory does not recognize or value? CRT
answers, yes. (p. 77)

In this case, it took a long time to get the school district to accept that the study of

Hmong as a World Language was equal in value as the study of any other world
language. For the Hmong students, it was more than just of equal value for them; the

Hmong as a world Language program was their pride, identity, and their future.

The positive consequences of the Hmong as World Language classes as indicated
in this study have included many of the long-term result that I anticipated and hoped for.
These positive consequences benefit Hmong American students, their families, and their
community and the schools and district. The one thing that was not in the picture when I
began the process was that I did not expect to have Hmong newcomers coming into the
United States and into the school system in 2004. I had not expected Hmong refugees to
be stuck in Thailand for so long. However, I am very pleased to see that the HWL
classes have provided many benefits for these students.

Students who participated with the HWL classes made positive academic progress
as well as finding their cultural identity and learning about and having the courage to do
what they need to do in college and life. They say that when they finish college they will
come back to make improvements in their community and I believe them. As a
researcher, I felt very touched by hearing these statements from students in the focus group.

Hmong language needs to be available to students in their elementary school years. Hmong language, culture, and history should be offered at the community college and university levels for students, especially, Hmong students. The reports from the focus group and teachers in this study indicate that the Hmong as World Language courses have helped the students who participated with the HWL classes academically, socially, and personally. Because BB High School has so far been the only high school that offered HWL classes, many Hmong students have not had the opportunity to study their heritage language. Today these students deserve the opportunity to study Hmong as a world language at the community college and university level.

The long journey to establish Hmong as a world language was followed by another long journey – the conduct of this study into the effects of the HWL program on the students, community and school. The study proves one point for sure – the journey is never over. Each stage is followed by another, and each is important in its own season. I would like to go back into the community to expand the study of Hmong language, culture, and history into programs at the middle school, high school, and two-year community college levels. I would also like to help build programs of Hmong studies, involving Hmong language, history and culture within the community college system. Some outstanding work has already been done to introduce the study of Hmong language, history and culture at the University level by Hmong professors. To further support this
existing effort and to reach the many young Hmong people who seek a postsecondary
education in the community college setting, this researcher urges establishing Hmong
studies as a transferable concentration at the community college level with articulation
into the CSU and UC systems. Such an expansion of Hmong Studies will require highly
educated and culturally grounded Hmong American scholars – teachers, researchers,
leaders. It will require journeys to reconnect with Hmong people around the world.

It has been a long and challenging journey to build bridges and create healing
processes for young Hmong Americans to return home to their families and their
community as they prepare themselves to thrive in the larger American society.
However, much has been accomplished and achieved and the possibilities for even more
good beckons.

Closing Statement

Kuv ntseeg tau hais tias tej vij sub vij sw, kev phem kev tsis zoo, thiab kev raug
luag quab yuam caij tsuj nyob rau hauv Hmoob lub neej twb dhau tag mus lawm. Txij li
no lawm yav tom ntej, Hmoob lub neej tsuas muaj yuav zoo tshaj yav dhau los: peb tej
tub tej ntxhais mus kawm txuj kawm ci tsuas muaj yuav txawj yuav ntse, lawv yuav muaj
lub siab loj lub siab dav rov los hlub niam hlub txiv thiab hlub ib tsoom kwv tij neej tsa
Hmoob sawv daws. Lawv yuav los sib pab txhim kho Hmoob lub neej. Hmoob tsuas
muaj yuav nyob dawb nyob huv thiab yuav nyob hauv vam ntws mus ib txhiab ib txhis.
Peb Hmoob yog ib haiy tib neeg muaj peev xwm thiab tij lim heev thaum peb sib pab.
Sawv daws sib koom tes nroos ua, peb yeej ua tau txhua txhia yam peb ntshaw kom tshwm sim!

Kuv ntseeg tau has tej vij sub sij sw, kev phem kev tsis zoo, hab kev raug luag quab yuam caij tsuj nyob tsau huv Moob lub neej twb dlhau moog taag lawm. Txij li nov lawm yaav tom ntej, Moob lub neej tsuas muaj yuav zoo tshaaj yaav dlhau lug: peb tej tub tej ntxhais moog kawm txuj kawm ci tsuas muaj yuav txawj yuav ntse, puab yuav muaj lub sab luj lub sab dlaav rov lug hlub nam hlub txiv hab hlub ib tsoom kwv tij neej tsaa Moob sawv dlawg. Puab yuav lug sib paab txhim khu Moob lub neej. Moob tsuas muaj yuav nyob dlawb nyob huv hab yuav nyob huaj vaam ntwg moog ib txhab ib txhis. Peb Moob yog ib haiv tuab neeg muaj peev xwm hab tij lim heev thaum peb sib paab. Suav dlawg sib koom teg nroos ua, peb yeej ua tau txhua txhia yam peb ntshaw kom tshwm sim!
English Translation of Closing Statement

I believe that the worst period for Hmong Americans has already passed. Terrible things have happened to Hmong people in our exile from our traditional home, in our journey as refugees, in the pain and violence that have hurt our families and our communities and in the oppression we have faced. From now on, the Hmong people will have a brighter future: our children will continue to excel in school and will return home to help their families. They will help each other to build the Hmong American community. The Hmong people will live in peace and will enjoy a prosperous life. We Hmong are very strong and capable people when we work together. Together, we can make our dreams come true!
APPENDICES
Appendix A

Interview Questions for Hmong World Language Teachers on Hmong American High School Students’ Experiences

The purpose of this interview is to ask high school teachers who teach Hmong as a World Language about their experiences with Hmong American students. The result will be used to help understand the academic needs of Hmong American high school students.

1. How long have you been a teacher?

2. How long have you worked at this high school?

3. What classes have you taught in your career as a teacher?

4. What classes do you teach today?

5. How long have you taught Hmong as a world language?

6. Have you seen any change in the demand for Hmong language classes since you began teaching Hmong? Explain.

7. If you have seen a change in the demand for Hmong language classes, what do you think are some of the reasons for this change?

8. What do you think are some of the most important issues facing Hmong American students today as they go through high school?

9. Describe the academic and social participation of Hmong American students in your Hmong language classes and in the high school generally.

10. Describe the effect that your Hmong world language classes have on the performance and adjustment of Hmong American students to their high school? Give examples of what you mean.
11. Describe the effect that your Hmong world language classes have on the adjustment of Hmong American students to their community and to the larger society? Give examples of what you mean.

12. What kind of support do you think a teacher working with Hmong American students should have in order for him/her to be successful at teaching these students?

13. If you could give three instructional strategies to teachers working with Hmong American students, what would they be?

14. Do you have any other comments?
Appendix B

Interview Questionnaire for Graduates on Hmong American High School Student Experience

The purpose of this interview is to ask Hmong American high school graduates about their high school experiences and the effect of those experiences on their life today. The results will be used to help understand the academic needs of Hmong American high school students.

First, let’s talk about your experiences as Hmong American students in high school here in Sacramento.

1. When did you graduate from high school?

2. Describe your four years of high school experience.

   For Example:
   a. What did you like best about high school?
   b. What did you like least about high school?
   c. What were your strengths as student in high school?
   d. What was the biggest challenge to you in high school?

3. What were some of the things that helped you to overcome academic barriers in high school?
   For example:
   a. Who were the people you would go to for help in your high school?
   b. Outside your high school?

4. If you had trouble understanding the content in a class in high school, what did you do?
   a. Did you ask for help? From whom?
   b. If you asked for help, were you given any help?

5. Was there a teacher who really helped you in your learning? What did that teacher do that made her or him such a good teacher?
6. What do you think your high school could have done better to help Hmong American high school students achieve success?

7. If you could have made one change about your high school, what would that change have been?

8. What strength did you receive from your family and your culture to help you as student when you were in high school?

9. What problems do you think Hmong American students still experience at your old school or in school generally?

Now, talk about the Hmong as World Language Class that you took in high school

10. You took the Hmong as World Language class. What levels, Level 1, 2, 3, or 4 classes, did you take?

   a. What was the best part of your Hmong language class?

   b. What would you change about the class?

   c. Did the class help you with anything at home or in the Hmong community? If yes, tell us a way that it helped you at home or in the Hmong community.

   d. Did the class help you with anything at school? If yes, tell us a way that it helped you at school.

   e. Before taking the class, how would you have rated your feelings about the Hmong language and culture? Positive, Neutral, or Negative?
f. After taking the class, did your feelings change towards the Hmong language and culture? If so, did they become more positive or more negative?

g. Would you advise a friend or your brothers and sisters to take that class?

So, how are you today?

11. What are you doing today?

12. How do your family and your culture help you today as a young adult?

13. What do you think are your greatest strengths today?

14. What are your plans for:
   a. Your future education?
   b. Your career?
   c. Your role in the community?

15. If you could give three pieces of advice to high school teachers about how they could help Hmong American students learn best, what would they be?

Do you have any other comments regarding your experiences as a high school student or your experiences as a young adult Hmong-American?
Appendix C

Hmong World Language Teacher Participation Consent Form

Dear Teacher:

My name is William Vang and I am a doctoral candidate in the Doctorate in Educational Leadership Program of the College of Education/College of Social Sciences & Interdisciplinary Studies at California State University Sacramento. For part of my research I will conduct an open-ended group interview of Hmong world language teachers regarding their experience of teaching and working with Hmong American high school students in an American public high school.

The purpose of the study is to identify which factors are most closely related to the academic success of Hmong American students in a high school in an urban school district in California and in particular to evaluate the impact of offering Hmong as a world language to Hmong high school students on the overall success of these students. The outcome of this research will be a greater understanding of the experience of Hmong American students in high school and recommendations for high schools to work more effectively with Hmong American students. No individual inducements are offered to participants.

As a researcher, I want to assure you that your participation is entirely voluntary. If you agree to participate in this group interview, you and one or more other Hmong world language teachers will be invited to meet with the researcher and each other to discuss your experiences in teaching the Hmong language to Hmong students and in teaching at an American high school with Hmong American students. The discussion will be guided by a series of open-ended interview questions. Your responses will be tape recorded. However, the tape recording will only be used by the researcher to obtain an accurate record of your comments. The tape recordings will not be shared with anyone and when this research is completed, the tape recordings will be destroyed. You may choose not to answer any question posed by the interviewer/researcher and you may end your participation at any time. Your participation will occur in a community setting and is in no way connected to the school or district in which you work.

I will use the information you share with me for a dissertation study entitled “Impact of Participation in Hmong World Language Classes on Hmong American High School Student Success.” All information that you provide will be kept confidential. Your name and the name of your school will not be used in my research. If any of your comments are cited in the paper, a pseudonym will be used.

You are free to withdraw your consent from the study at any time. You have a right to review material prior to my submitting the paper in its final form.

Thank you so much for your collaboration and support. If you have any questions about the study or would like to review the material, you may contact me at wvang06@comcast.net or at (916) 278-7690 or rblnchrd@csus.edu.
I agree to participate in this study and to have my participation in the focus group recorded by tape recorder.

________________________
Signature of Participant

________________________
Signature of Researcher

Date

Date
Appendix D

Hmong American High School Graduate Participation Consent Form

Dear Recent Graduate:

My name is William Vang and I am a doctoral candidate in the Doctorate in Educational Leadership Program of the College of Education/College of Social Sciences & Interdisciplinary Studies. As part of my research, I am conducting a group interview of a small number of Hmong American recent high school graduates who took one or more classes of Hmong as a World Language while in high school.

The purpose of the study is to identify factors related to the academic success of Hmong American students in a high school in an urban school district in California and, in particular to examine the impact on student outcomes of taking Hmong as a world language as part of your regular high school program. The outcome of this research will be a greater understanding of the experience of Hmong American students in high school and recommendations for high schools to work more effectively with Hmong American students. No individual inducements are offered to participants.

I would like to interview you and other Hmong American high school seniors on your high school academic experience. The interview will take place in a group setting with you and a small number of other recent Hmong American high school graduates who also studied Hmong as a world language in high school. If you agree to participate in this group interview, you and between five and seven other Hmong American high school graduates will be invited to meet with the researcher and each other to discuss your recent experiences as students at an American high school and the impact of taking Hmong as a world language on your high school experience. I will also ask you some questions about how you feel today about those experiences and about your plans for your future.

As a researcher, I want to assure you that your participation is entirely voluntary. The discussion will be guided by a series of open-ended interview questions. Your responses will be tape recorded. However, the tape recording will only be used by the researcher to obtain an accurate record of your comments. The tape recordings will not be shared with anyone and when this research is completed, the tape recordings will be destroyed. You may choose not to answer any question posed by the interviewer/researcher and you may end your participation at any time. Your participation will occur in a community setting.

I will use the information you share with me for a dissertation study entitled “Impact of Participation in Hmong World Language Classes on Hmong American High School Student Success.” All information that you provide will be kept confidential. Your name and the name of the school you attended will not be used in my research. If any of your comments are cited in the paper, a pseudonym will be used.

You are free to withdraw your consent from the study at any time. You have a right to review material prior to my submitting the paper in its final form.

Thank you so much for your collaboration and support. If you have any questions about the study or would like to review the material, you may contact me at wvang06@comcast.net at anytime. You may also contact Dr. Rosemary Ann Blanchard, my dissertation committee chair person, at (916) 278-7690 or rblnchrd@csus.edu.

I agree to participate in this study and to have my participation in the focus group recorded by tape recorder.
Signature of Participant ___________________________ Date

Signature of Researcher ___________________________ Date
REFERENCES


