

THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF HMONG STUDENTS
AT JOHN MUIR ELEMENTARY

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Abstract

The Educational Experience of Hmong Students at John Muir Elementary

The story of the Hmong people is a story of facing adversity and adapting to grow as a community and a people. The Hmong students of John Muir Elementary have faced this adversity in their journey to find academic success in the educational landscape of America, in Kirkland, WA. Standardized testing reveals that these Hmong students are struggling to meet academic standards.

This study sought to find the educational experience for the Hmong students of John Muir Elementary. To discover what role history and culture from Southeast Asia, home and family support, language, community programs, and academic achievement played in their educational experience.

Through interviews of Hmong students at John Muir Elementary I discovered there are numerous unique challenges these students face in their attempt to achieve academic success. The value of education and educational systems were quite different historically for these students and for their families in Southeast Asia. Parents and families are highly supportive of students' education here at John Muir Elementary; however, parents are often ill-prepared to fully support children with the educational demands and language necessary to meet academic standards. In addition, language development continues to be a major obstacle for Hmong students in achieving Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency in addition to Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills. Furthermore, I discovered there are multiple community programs in place meeting the needs of these students that would great benefit from collaboration with the

school and staff. Finally, I learned of the need for concentrated communication with students and families, concerning the assessing and reporting practices, so both students and families understand the academic growth process and necessary steps moving forward.

This study concluded that to help Hmong students at John Muir Elementary meet academic standards, consistent collaboration with parents, teachers, students, and community organizations needs to occur to maintain clear understandings of systems and strategies as well as accountability for academic progress.

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Introduction

Imagine you're transplanted into a completely different culture. You have just left a region engrossed by war, fleeing to whatever nation will provide protection. After enduring lengthy stays in refugee camps, you finally make it to America. Once in America you realize this will be your new home. The culture, the food, the language, the landscape, everything about your new reality is seemingly different. This has been the reality of the Hmong people, since they first started immigrating to America in 1975.

John Muir Elementary (JME) in Kirkland, WA has historically had a large population of Hmong students in attendance. Some students come from families that have immigrated years earlier, with additional generations acclimating to the cultural landscape and language of America. Whereas, others are recent immigrants; coming to America within the last ten years.

With the many differences between the Hmong cultural experience in Southeast Asia, compared to the experience in America today, there are numerous challenges for Hmong students at JME. In recent years students have performed below standard on standardized tests including the WASL and MSP. Students have struggled with academic vocabulary and transferring knowledge into multiple settings.

Contemplating the Hmong experience at JME instills a desire to delve deeper. What were educational expectations within the Hmong culture, in the various Southeast Asian countries? How does the educational experience differ in America compared to the Hmong people's experience in Southeast Asia?

Through research and interviews I have found both distinct differences and similarities between the Hmong educational experience in Southeast Asia and at JME. By

better understanding the cultural comparisons between these two cultures, as well as analyzing the experience of Hmong students from JME, I predict teachers will be able to more effectively teach these students, bringing about increased growth. I began this project with a review of the pertinent research surrounding this topic.

Literature Review

Since 1975 Hmong students have been enrolled in American public schools. There are numerous pockets across America with large populations of Hmong students. Many Hmong English Language Learners (ELL) students have grown up, attended college, and have assimilated into the American culture. Before looking at the case study of Hmong ELL students at JME, I first want to review the research of the culture and history of the Hmong in Southeast Asia before immigrating to America; the role of families and their relationship with their child's education; the function community organizations play in Hmong students' lives; the debate of the Hmong language being used at the school; and the research concerning the state of academic achievement for Hmong students in America.

Hmong Culture and History in Southeast Asia

In his case study of the Hmong in Northern Thailand, Aranya Siriphon (2006) compiled a history of the Hmong people. He summarized the history of the Hmong as one marked by war and migration. The Hmong people consistently found themselves driven from their homes as wars continually impacted them. Dating back to the early 1800s, numerous wars in China drove the Hmong south to the mountain regions of Southeast Asia. Later, during the time period of the Vietnam War, many Hmong became involved as "guerilla fighters in the 'secret war' in Laos" (Siriphon, 2006, p. 68). As a

result of their involvement in this “secret war” well over 100,000 Hmong were driven to refugee camps in Thailand with close to 200,000 staying in Laos (McCall, 1999, p. 231). From such refugee camps is where many of the Hmong, who now live in America have come.

The state of Hmong agricultural practices is extremely relevant to the lives of Hmong students at JME. Students’ writing, stories, and experiences are often associated with working at the farm or selling products at markets. It is a vital lens through which they view the world and make connections. This salient feature to Hmong culture is seen as Siriphon (2006) goes on to look at the agricultural practices of the Hmong in Northern Thailand. The Hmong have always been a farming community. Yet, through the challenges of their migration and interactions with governments, they have had to shift their agricultural and cultivation practices. The Hmong originally practiced fallow cultivation of three crops: maize, dry rice, and opium. However, because of government sanctions due to deforestation as well as propaganda of the Hmong as drug cultivators, the Hmong have changed their practices to grow cash crops and less invasive crops. The majority of their time and resources is tied up in these agricultural practices.

In Hmong families, emphasis was made on work and supporting the family, with little need for education. Families were intentionally large to maintain the work needed for the agricultural lifestyle, and it was expected that each member of the family put first priority on ensuring the family’s survival (McCall, 1999, p. 231). The livelihood for Hmong people living in Southeast Asia was physical work; thus, there wasn’t a great deal of emphasis on education. In her analysis of Hmong culture and history Ava McCall writes,

Most Hmong children and youth did not attend school because schools were a considerable distance from their villages. If a family could afford to educate their children, only the sons attended school. The Hmong culture was primarily an oral culture, with history and culture passed along verbally from elders to children and grandchildren. Those Hmong living in Laos until the 1950s were not literate in their first language because their native language had no written form until American and French missionaries used the Romanized popular alphabet system to record Hmong in the 1950s (McCall, 1999, p. 231).

Furthermore, in her novel *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, Anne Fadiman expands the differences in culture, when she shares about Hmong culture in Southeast Asia, “Since no one knew how to read, no one felt deprived or inconvenienced by the lack of literacy. Everything the next generation needed to know was passed on orally and by example” (1997, p. 121). These understandings of Hmong culture and history from Southeast Asia provide a foundation for understanding transitions as the Hmong people immigrated to America.

Home and Family Support

Christopher Vang, in his article *Hmong-American Students Still Face Multiple Challenges in Public Schools*, aims to identify challenges Hmong students face in American schools as well as means to raise academic achievement. He shares that “the following factors contribute to academic success: (a) demonstration of support, interest, and encouragement toward children’s education; (b) placement of high value on education, success, respect for the instructors, and motivation to learn; and (c) a strong work ethic, positive role models, and authoritative parenting” (2010, p. 28). Vang demonstrates multiple points where the perceptions of parents in modeling and supporting education have a profound impact on the student’s ability to succeed academically. With regards to family support Vang found,

Students whose parents are illiterate in English or their primary language are more likely to be underachievers in school. For Hmong immigrants...parents’ educational backgrounds, their pre-arrival education from refugee camps or native countries and their perceptions of the American educational system played roles in their children’s academic achievement. A large number of

Hmong parents are unable to provide necessary academic support at home...some Hmong children are left to fend for themselves in school since there is no support system at home (2010, p29).

Many researchers and educators concur that the involvement of the family is essential for the success of Hmong students as well as any student. However, there are many roadblocks to family involvement both at school and support at home. In addition to parents' academic background, Susan Adler proposes that "Perhaps the biggest constraint to Hmong parent involvement is language differences" (2004, p.71). Adler goes on to describe attempts on the part of teachers to communicate with parents, and even after conveying messages through translators, they are unsure the message was received. Following up, Adler shares,

When I asked the aide about this, she indicated that direct, verbatim translations are not always possible in Hmong. She was not chatting or having a social conversation with the parent. I found all of the Hmong employees in this school to be professional and knowledgeable. But they were aware that the sociopolitical context of the school was based on a European American curriculum, and the school was a place where Southeast Asians were considered a 'foreign' group, with linguistic and cultural differences (2004, p. 71).

Adler insinuates that perhaps parents' inability to speak English is not always the problem with language. Perhaps teachers might not be as prone to communicate with a parent in Hmong, through an interpreter, because they don't know what exactly is being said.

The majority of research would support Christopher Vang's statement regarding the issue of family support, when he states, "Most U.S. Hmong parents are concerned about their children's education, but many of them are refugees who have not had any formal education and lack the educational background to provide the necessary support at home" (2010, p.27). Ngo, Bigelow, and Wahlstrom found that Hmong adults in their study "were not literate in any language, including Hmong. Our research revealed that this inexperience with the schools and education had implications for parents'

expectation of and interactions with schools and teachers” (Ngo, et al., 2007 p. 23). In their study they concluded that “Hmong parents’ limited English proficiency and lack of knowledge about schooling in the US are major barriers to their engagement with their children’s education” (2007, p.3).

Language

There are numerous debates regarding whether or not students who speak a native language other than English should be taught with a bilingual approach, or instruction solely carried out in English with support for ELL students. Saint Paul, Minnesota was provided with an excellent opportunity to assess these different approaches with the immigration of close to 1,000 Hmong students in 2004. With the closing of the final Hmong refugee camp, Wat Tham Krabok, Saint Paul Public Schools created several Transitional Language Centers (TLC) to transition Hmong students to American culture, education, and language.

Researchers Ngo, et al. (2007) also explored the differences between Hmong students in TLCs as well as the already established Language Academy (LA) programs. The TLCs involved classrooms that were completely comprised of newcomer Hmong ELL students and had two teachers, with at least one being bilingual; the classrooms were also multi-age. Whereas, the LA programs were integrated with Hmong newcomers as well as both native and “near-native” English speakers in a grade-level class. The classrooms had pull-out services for ELL and other services; however, there was no consistency with bilingual staff (Ngo, et al., 2007, p. 6). Through their interviews and analysis, Ngo, et al. found that the TLC program had advantages over the LA model. They came to this conclusion because they found students in the LA model were only

taught “survival English” or Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS). Yet, when bilingual staff was present, students were more engaged and able to demonstrate higher critical thinking and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). This is seen in an example where “a teacher at a LA school noted that it would be good to do higher level questions and research with a big project, but that this was only possible with language support. According to the teacher, educational assistants ‘are excellent at like conveying concepts in Hmong and kids ask questions’” (Ngo, et al., 2007, p. 11). Through their investigation the researchers believed “that TLCs were better able to provide an environment of comfort that encouraged learning and smoothed the transition to mainstream classrooms. However, data from the Hmong parents showed that their experience with their children’s transition to school in the US were similar across the two programs” (Ngo, et al., 2007, p. 5).

Another perspective on the use of native language in the classroom can be seen through the research of Susan Adler. In a questionnaire of staff at a school with a large Hmong population, she found that some staff “indicated that home language, in this case Hmong, should not be taught in the classroom, a position consistent with ELL (English language learners) programs rather than bilingual education programs, where native language as well as standard English is used for instruction” (Adler, 2004, p. 64). However, on another question where she asked the staff to what extent they agreed with the statement “Bilingual education is critical for the academic success of Hmong students”, 100% either agreed or strongly agreed (Adler, 2004, p. 63).

Community Programs

Lee and Hawkins, in their article titled *Family is Here: Learning in Community-Based After-School Programs* (2008) discuss the vital importance of after-school community programs for children of lower socio-economic status, especially those from immigrant families. They state, “research on immigrant education suggests that working class and poor immigrant children are most vulnerable to school failure” (Lee & Hawkins, 2008, p. 52). However, Lee and Hawkins propose there are other learning environments to facilitate growth for students, not just the time in school. In researching these students who are prone to academic failure they found,

Immigrant children in the city we researched, especially newcomers, tend to live in housing complexes with other immigrants and newcomers. They do not have access to the out-of-school activities in which their mainstream middle-class peers engage. Thus their out-of-school time is spent in their neighborhood. Community centers tend to be the location in which they gather (2008, p. 53).

As part of their research they performed a case study on an apartment complex’s community center, comprised of mostly immigrant families, including a large Hmong population. Of the centers they studied, they found all to be strongly education-focused, with many resources and structures for educational support. However, Lee and Hawkins found “that the centers were not engaging children in authentic, meaningful literacy-rich activities in the ways promoted by current educational research” (2008, p. 54). While these particular centers weren’t entirely successful from their perspective in supporting the Hmong students academically, they felt they provided both students and families an opportunity to bring Hmong and American culture together in a successful way. They found these community centers to be a huge asset in authenticating the challenges both parents and children face with competing cultures. Even though researchers found the community centers less than successful in their academic aims; they felt these centers were very successful in understanding the other factors both Hmong students and family

members face. Lee and Hawkins conclude that “Through interactions, modeling, and overt conversations, participants constructed and enacted new identities together. It is precisely this relational aspect that is missing from schooling for immigrant youth” (2008, p. 56).

Academic Achievement

Through researching the state of academic achievement for Hmong students, Christopher Vang finds that “the majority of Hmong students have been living in the U.S. for quite some time and are still not doing well in school” (Vang, 2010, p. 32). Even with second generations of Hmong-American students entering schools, researchers are finding Hmong students are not achieving academic success.

One way academic success is determined can be seen through the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act. Here standardized test scores clearly show students’ academic achievement. Part of the NCLB legislation created formulas to measure Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Increased pressure is now put on such standardized tests, and researchers and educators are looking for ways to track student progress with the new testing landscape. With this in mind, researchers Muyskens, Betts, Lau, and Marston explored the Curriculum-Based Measures (CBM), in an effort to determine performance on state tests for ELL students. They found that “several studies have reported moderate to high correlations between CBM and state assessments” (Muyskens, et al., 2009, p. 12). After conducting their study, they found that

This study suggests that the long-standing finding related to the validity of CBM measures are also applicable to ELL students. The findings of this study also support the notion that these results are applicable across three very divergent language groups (Spanish, Hmong, and Somali). This is particularly interesting because the limited previous research data supporting the use of CBM with ELL students has primarily focused upon Spanish-speaking students, but no study, as we are aware has been conducted for Hmong and Somali students (Muyskens, et al. 2009, p. 12).

While this test helps indicate whether Hmong ELL students will pass or fail, as well as progress monitoring, it still leaves one with the question of how to raise student achievement for Hmong ELL students.

In understanding how Hmong ELL students are performing academically, specifically with regards to language, Vang identifies two different language types. He finds that “Many have poor language skills (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills- BICS), helpful only for survival. They still lack academic language needed to perform academic tasks (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency- CALP) (Vang, 2010, p. 32).

At one school, researchers, in their attempt to increase Hmong students’ higher level thinking skills, abilities, and CALP, implemented cross-age, paired, and interactive tutoring (CAPIT). The program consisted of fifth grade Hmong students tutoring first grade English speaking students. The researchers “hypothesized that by concentrating on higher level thinking with a meaningful, integrated, concrete context such as tutoring, we could reinforce behaviors required for future school success at advanced levels as well as improve literacy skills” (Lamb & Baca, 1999, p. 8). After each of the 40 tutoring sessions the Hmong tutors reflected on the experience and responded through writing in journals. Throughout the course of the 40 CAPIT tutoring sessions, the researchers found

In summary, the results show tutors increasing in (a) the number and kinds of literate behaviors; (b) thoughtful behaviors related to literacy; (c) written production of thoughts, ideas, and language specific to CAPIT; (d) engagement in reading; (e) developing a sense of personal agency; (f) ability to write cohesively; and (g) literacy skills (Lamb & Baca, 1999, p. 11).

While there are multiple stories of success in raising the academic achievement for Hmong students in America, there are still troubling issues. Moosung Lee and Na'im Madyun, in their research of Hmong Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students share that, “Since immigrating to the USA post-1975, approximately 70% of the Hmong

population has been deemed illiterate” (Lee & Madyun, 2008, p. 320). Furthermore, after their case study with public middle school students in St Paul, Minnesota (largest Hmong population in US), they found that on standardized reading tests 83.8% of Hmong students were classified as LEP (Lee & Madyun, 2008, p. 324).

Summary

There are many stories related to Hmong students:

- Historically the Hmong culture has not placed as great an importance on formal education, dating back to their origins in Southeast Asia.
- Parents and families face numerous challenges that keep them from fully supporting student progress.
- Schools discover mixed results with bilingual education programs for Hmong students.
- In St Paul, MN, nearly 84% of middle school Hmong students have serious language needs.
- Communities are finding success in building connections between Hmong and American culture through after-school programs.
- Across America nearly two thirds of Hmong students are considered non-proficient in English.
- Fifth grade Hmong students have found success through tutoring to raise their academic achievement.

The stories of Hmong students in various pockets across America are many. However, one story has not been told; the story that asks, what is the educational experience for Hmong students at John Muir Elementary in Kirkland, Washington?

Research Question

To more fully discover the educational experience for Hmong students at JME, I am left with numerous questions. In this project I sought to identify the comprehensive educational experience for Hmong students at JME. My focus pertained to themes of Hmong culture and history in Southeast Asia, home and family support, language, community programs, and academic achievement. These themes contribute to the primary question at the heart of this study: What is the educational experience for Hmong students from JME in Kirkland, Washington?

Methodology

Method/Rationale

In this research project I used a qualitative methodology. Specifically, I performed a case study to highlight the educational experiences of several different Hmong students from JME. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines case study as “the attempt to understand a particular person, institution, society, etc., by assembling information about his or its development; the record of such an attempt” (OED, 1989). This qualitative case study accomplished what the definition suggests; I attempted to understand the educational experience for Hmong students at JME through data collection, by means of interviews.

I could not think of a better way to understand the views and reality of Hmong students at JME than to look at the many facets of their lives, which compose their educational experience at JME? By making the focus of the research a case study on the lives of Hmong students, I gained a far deeper insight to their educational experience than other means of research. In her book regarding action research, Cher Hendricks states,

“because qualitative and practitioner researchers engage in studies that focus on the ways context impacts certain outcomes, it is reasonable to conclude that their results are applicable to settings with similar contexts” (2009, p. 4). With a case study, I was able to observe and analyze the lives of a small group of Hmong students, which will help transfer the findings to the larger Hmong population at JME with similar attributes.

Sample

Data was collected through interviews with five students from JME. Interviewees included four intermediate students and one primary student. I had initially set out to interview multiple primary students; however, found the majority of students were unable to answer the questions. Interviews with primary students revealed many weren't far enough along in English acquisition, as well as understanding of life in Southeast Asia or ability to generate much response to interview questions. The four intermediate students interviewed came from different families. Whereas, the one primary student was a sibling of an intermediate interviewee. These interviewees enabled me to see similarities and differences of the educational experience from within a Hmong family group, as well as across multiple family groups.

The interviews of these students helped create a picture of the educational experiences for Hmong students at JME. Different subgroups of age and family added additional dimensions to interview questions, as well as a wide range of data. The differences in age provided varied experiences in immigration stories, family responsibilities, language acquisition, among other important factors. In addition, similarities and differences with interviewees from the same family group provided different perspectives to interview questions.

Instrumentation

In the interviews a series of questions were asked. The interview process consisted of the following questions:

Hmong Culture & History in Southeast Asia

- Describe where your family comes from.
 - Has your family told you what education was like there? If so, describe.
 - What was life like there?
- Were you born in America or another country?
 - If another country, where were you born?
 - What do you remember from your native country?
 - What do you remember of education or learning from living there?

Home and Family Support

- What are your responsibilities at home?
- What kind of help do you get at home with school work?
 - Parents, siblings, other relatives?
- What does your family tell you about school? (Their view of school)
 - How much do they understand?
 - Through conferences, letters, translators
- Who reads and writes at your home?

Language

- When did you learn to speak English?
 - Describe the process of learning English
 - Have you had challenges learning English?
- Have you been in ELL at JME?
 - Describe what ELL is like.
 - Does what you learn in ELL help you in the classroom?
- Do you speak Hmong at JME?
 - When?
- Would it help if you could speak more Hmong at school?
- Would it help if teachers could teach in Hmong part of the time?

Community Programs

- Do you go to any after school programs?
 - (Kirkland Heights, Boys & Girls Club, Summer Camp, Other)
 - How do you spend your time there?
 - How do you feel about your time there?
 - How does your family feel about your time there?

Academic Achievement

- What do you think the purpose of school is for?
- Do you understand how you are graded?
 - Report card?
 - Standard-based reporting (1,2,3,4)

- Have you taken the WASL or the MSP? (If you haven't, have you taken the DIBELS, TRC, or DRP)
 - How do you feel about those tests?
 - Do you know how you have scored on those tests?
 - Why do you think students take those tests?
- Have you worked with a Safety Net teacher or a before school group?
 - What do you work on at groups?
 - Why do you think you go to those groups?
- What are difficulties you have at school, or have had at school?
 - Learning difficulties?
 - Other difficulties?
- What has helped you succeed at school?

Interviews were conducted in the JME library before and during school. While interviewing I asked students the interview questions and took notes on their responses. After reading the compiled data from each interview session, I reflected on the information and completed the process of analysis.

To ensure anonymity as well as protection for students, I used codes for the students I interviewed. I did not include any student names, or the names of teachers, families, or other individuals who are identified throughout the course of interviews.

Analysis/Validity

In analyzing the data, I looked for themes and patterns in student responses. With each question I drew comparisons as well as noted differences from the student responses. I grouped my findings into the themes highlighted in the implementation section: Hmong culture and history in Southeast Asia, home and family support, language, community programs, and academic achievement.

To triangulate data I conducted multiple interviews with students. I reviewed and repeated questions in order to adjust students' responses as needed. I also shared with students what I heard them say, through my notes and inquired if it was an accurate account of their responses. Furthermore, I reflected on interviews throughout the process

to determine the applicability and validity of the interview questions I selected. Finally, to guarantee reliability of the findings, I further triangulated my data by sharing my conclusions with interviewees.

I entered this research endeavor with no doubts that I had pre-conceived notions and biases. I have taught at JME for five years, and have had numerous Hmong students in my classroom, as well as interactions with other Hmong students and families. Since my time at JME I have been fascinated by the Hmong community and their culture. As a result I have researched the culture, witnessed Hmong families interacting at events such as farmer's markets and Hmong New Year celebrations. I had numerous inferences as to how students might respond to questions as well as perceived opinions on the part of JME staff and other community members. However, it is my passion for working with JME's diverse population, most especially our Hmong students that enabled me to leave any such pre-conceived notions behind. To truly discover the educational experience for Hmong students at JME, I had to be impartial and allow the data to lead my research. To do this, I have shared all my data from interviews and not just information that supports my hypotheses. Without valid, impartial research, the findings of this project will have no bearing on supporting Hmong students for further growth at JME and in life.

Data

All of my data comes from the interviews of five JME students identified as students A through E. I have broken each interview section into the five themes of my research; Hmong culture and history in Southeast Asia, home and family support, language, community programs, and academic achievement.

Hmong Culture and History in Southeast Asia

The following interview questions centered on the theme of culture and history of the Hmong people. Particularly, students' understanding of the influences of their family and heritage.

Question 1: Describe where your family comes from. Has your family told you what education was like there? If so, describe.

Answers:

Student A: In Thailand when my parents were my age they went to school. The schools were smaller than John Muir. They learned math. Discipline was with sticks if you got questions wrong or had bad behavior.

Student B: You get in trouble a lot. You got hit with sticks.

Student D: I wasn't in school in Thailand. My cousin was in school. I think my Mom and Dad went to school. I think school was the same but different with the language.

Student E: My mom never went to school. My mom sent us to a school where the Thai people taught. If we didn't do homework or got in trouble we were hit in the head. I only learned the ABCs in Thai in school there.

Question 2: What was life like there?

Answers:

Student A: When it rains the rivers flooded. Flooding was dangerous. My dad made a pool out of bricks and bamboo with rain water from the roof. There were outdoor markets. There were special paintings in the market. Streets were different. Mostly mud, could be used for sculpting and art projects. Everything was farming. It was all Hmong people who lived there.

Student D: Life was the same.

Student E: It's different because you have to drive many hours. We have to drive all the way to Bangkok to get food. We lived with the Hmong people.

Question 3: Were you born in America or another country? If another country, where were you born?

Answers:

Student A: Thailand

Student B: Thailand

Student D: Thailand

Student E: Thailand

Question 4: What do you remember from your native country?

Answers:

Student B: Nothing

Student D: We go farming in the morning and we play until night and we would get in trouble. Some of our Hmong houses were made out of kinda like bamboo. Some people were really rich and live in those house that are made out of rocks like concrete.

Everyone spoke Hmong.

Student E: My dad had many wives. He sent my mom and step moms to America.

Question 5: What do you remember of education or learning from living there?

Answers:

Student A: There were Thai classes. My sister learned to speak Thai. It was dangerous, my sister almost got attacked by a snake, so my parents decided to not have me go to school.

Student B: There was Thai and Hmong school.

Student D: At school they learned a different language like Thai.

Student E: School was good but we had a big group and you had to use the pointer to answer questions. You go up one at a time. No projects. You stay with the whole class. Recess you get to play. Teacher talked a lot. Students one at a time answering questions. Teachers were mean and strict.

Home and Family Support

This section of interview questions sought to gain insight to support structures at home, including family opinions, the abilities of family members to help with academics, and the responsibilities of students in the home.

Question 1: What are your responsibilities at home?

Answers:

Student A: Cooking and cleaning. Doing my homework. Washing dishes. Work at the farm in the summer and on Saturdays when they're so busy selling flowers and vegetables at the markets.

Student B: Chores and homework.

Student D: Clean up the floor, mopping. To clean up my room. Make sure homework is done, but I do homework at Boys and Girls Club. Take care of my little brother. When I'm done I have free time. And wash dishes. Sometimes I get to make food. When my family goes to the farm, sometimes I make food when I'm waiting for them.

Student E: When guests come home we clean the house before. We have a guest room too.

Question 2: What kind of help do you get at home with school work?

Answers:

Student A: My older brother and sister help me with my work.

Student B: My sister helps me.

Student D: I get help with math. My dad teach me math. Sometimes I read and I teach my Mom and Dad to read. Like a word they don't know, I teach them.

Student E: My sister helps me with school.

Question 3: What is your family's view of school. How much do they understand what is happening at school?

Answers:

Student A: They tell me to read the dictionary to understand words. They want me to know my time tables and math facts. They know I need to learn more about writing. They know about the things I'm learning at school.

Student B: They kind of know what's happening. Yes, they understand report cards.

Student D: I think they understand some of it, but some of the newsletters they can't read. They understand how I'm doing at conferences. Like my dad told me to work harder on reading after the conference.

Student E: She knows we're not reaching our goal. My little brother needs help pronouncing letters like the "T" sound. We translate it to my mom.

Question 4: Who reads or writes in your home?

Answers:

Student A: Everyone except my little sister. My parents read Hmong and Thai. My dad is learning how to read Chinese. They also write in Hmong and Thai.

Student B: My sister and me and my older sister.

Student D: My Dad, Mom, and Uncle. They read. My auntie who became citizens told my parents to read those books to become citizens, so I help translate the Constitution and stuff. Some things they read are in English. There's not much books about Hmong at home, but they read in Thai.

Student E: I do. My Mom tried school, but had no baby sitters, so she had to stop school. She does know how to write. She can write in Hmong.

Language

Interview questions in the language section dealt with the process of language acquisition for students, support services received, and the role of bilingualism in learning and school contexts.

Question 1: When did you learn to speak English? Describe the process of learning English.

Answers:

Student A: I don't know who taught me to speak English. I think it happened when we came to America. In kindergarten I didn't know, but then in first grade I learned.

Student B: 1st grade. It was hard. The sounds were hard.

Student C: When I started going to preschool at John Muir.

Student D: When I came to school in John Muir. I think I was like 5 or 6 in kindergarten.

Student E: I learned at John Muir. I was about 5 in kindergarten. It was really hard.

Question 2: Have you had challenges learning English.

Answers:

Student A: No it wasn't hard.

Student B: Sounds. You have to make the sounds of the words and sounding it out and that's hard.

Student C: Yes it was. Because I was shy. It kind of made it easier when there were other Hmong students with me.

Student D: It was hard at the first time to learn. Because I don't understand English that much. Mostly in the classroom I learned English. When I went to ELL I learned more to it, to English.

Student E: When the teacher asked me to read the word I couldn't, I tried and tried.

Question 3: Describe what English Language Learner (ELL) classes were like.

Answers:

Student A: They do the same we do in class (content). We take a test

Student B: It was reading and sometimes writing. We sang songs. The songs kind of helped. The hand motions helped. A lot of vocabulary.

Student C: I go everyday. Same things as classroom but done differently.

Student D: Some stories that we read and we had to do answers. Respond to them.

Student E: It helped me a lot. To get my own language and words.

Question 4: Does what you learn at ELL help you in the classroom?

Answers:

Student A: Yes. It helps me because they kinda in the classroom is kind of what we learn in here, so it helps you understand.

Student C: Yes it does. I learned nouns and pronouns.

Student D: Yes, it helps me learn better or writing or the reading books what you're reading.

Student E: It helped me a lot.

Question 5: Do you speak Hmong at John Muir Elementary?

Answers:

Student A: At recess.

Student B: Yes, at recess.

Student C: At recess and at lunch. Sometimes in my classroom. Sometimes in ELL. At recess the most.

Student D: At recess mostly, sometimes in the classroom.

Student E: Yes. Anytime.

Question 6: Would it help if you could speak more Hmong at school?

Answers:

Student A: No. It helped me when I was younger. In first grade I could wait to speak Hmong at recess. I speak Hmong when my friends speak to me in Hmong. My dad tells me when I'm in school to speak English all the time. At my house I should only speak Hmong. That way I won't get messed up.

Student B: Maybe.

Student C: No. Because I need to learn more English.

Student D: Maybe it would help.

Student E: My Mom said we should talk in English. But at recess and with friends we can talk Hmong.

Question 7: Would it help if your teachers could speak Hmong part of the time?

Answers:

Student A: Yes, because some words I don't know. They could explain to me. They could explain to me Try, Check, and Revise and other problem solving strategies.

Student B: Yeah. Because they can explain in our language what we're doing.

Student C: Yes. Because they could speak Hmong they could teach together.

Student D: Yeah. So when the conferences don't understand English more than if the teachers learn to speak Hmong, then teachers can speak to the parents that don't understand English that much. It would help so we understand words like those big vocabulary words we don't understand.

Student E: Yes, they could explain things we don't understand.

Community Programs

This section sought to find where JME Hmong students spent their time outside of school hours. Particularly, what community programs and out-of-school organizations were JME Hmong students involved. In addition, how was time spent and what were the perceptions of students and families with these programs and organizations.

Question 1: Do you go to any after school programs?

Answers:

Student A: Boys & Girls Club and Kirkland Heights.

Student B: Sometimes Boys & Girls Club- we read and play on the computers. Some events at Kirkland Heights.

Student C: Yes, Boys & Girls Club. I read and play carpet ball. They help me with my homework. Kirkland Heights Events. Sometimes I go to the classes and events.

Student D: Boys & Girls Club and Kirkland Heights. Game club with computers and pool tables and other games and electronics. Sometimes there are movie nights with new

movies and there's Jesus Club where we learned about Jesus and then there's swimming and barbecuing.

Student E: I go to Boys & Girls Club and Kirkland Heights.

Question 2: How do you spend your time there?

Answers:

Student A: When I was younger I got help from the Boys & Girls Club. Sometimes I do now. But now my siblings help me more with homework. We play volleyball and have a team. Kirkland Heights we go to movie night and the party. There are classes on how to take care of your teeth. Jesus clubs and on Friday we go to the pool. I went to Camp Brotherhood. We practiced dancing (dinosaurs and penguins). At night on the stage they dance and sing. We swim too.

Student B: Summer Camp and Jesus Club. Homework help for math and reading, also science.

Student D: Boys & Girls Club- doing my homework and after one hour we go to the game room and play carpet ball or pool. Usually we stay in the computer lab, we play games or use the computer.

Student E: We have "Power Hour" and then play games. They help with homework. At Kirkland Heights we play games and we can ask help for homework. We get snacks.

Question 3: How do you feel about your time there?

Answers:

Student B: I don't like Boys & Girls Club. There's barely anything to do. The Kirkland Heights events I sometimes like.

Student C: Yes I like it (Boys and Girls Club). Because it's fun.

Student D: I like going to those places. Sometimes I get really tired after a long day at school like the MSP days.

Student E: I like it.

Question 4: How does your family feel about your time there?

Answers:

Student A: They like Boys & Girls Club because it helps us with our homework and go on field trips. They help the Kirkland Heights people. My Mom and Dad don't always want us to go to Kirkland Heights events, but sometimes they let us go. Because they want us to stay and learn. It's sometimes dangerous at Kirkland Heights.

Student D: Boys & Girls Club- they feel good about it because we get our homework done there. Kirkland Heights- game club they let me go to play with my friends in there.

Student E: My Mom really likes us to go to Boys & Girls Club because we get all our homework done there.

Academic Achievement

The final theme of interview questions dealt with academic achievement, specifically related to standards based testing and reporting. Questions included student and family understanding of reporting systems and test results, as well as the purpose and process of standards based testing, and in-school support structures that come as a result of testing results.

Question 1: What do you think the purpose of school is for?

Answers:

Student A: To have a better life. After you learn at school then you can have jobs and earn money.

Student B: To learn things.

Student C: For learning English.

Student D: To learn and so when you grow up you can be like a scientist or other stuff like a doctor and coming to school is really helpful for the students.

Student E: To learn more new things.

Question 2: Do you understand how you are graded on the report card?

Answers:

Student A: Yes I see the report card. Yes I understand it.

Student B: Yes. I sort of understand the categories.

Student C: Yes, I've seen it.

Student D: I understand it when it has the words like math, reading, and core subjects. I don't really understand the sub-categories (informational/literary text).

Student E: Yes.

Question 3: Do you understand the standards based grading system of 1,2,3, and 4?

Answers:

Student A: It's hard to explain. Those are your grades. I can't explain the differences.

Student B: A one is below grade level, a two is the same, a three is at standard, and a four is beyond standard. Standard means at grade level.

Student C: No.

Student D: Three means you're like there, four means you're above, a two means you're almost there, and a one means you have to work harder.

Student E: A one is like you're not getting it, a two is you're not trying, a three is you're at standard, a four is above standard.

Question 4: How do you feel about the Measurement of Student Progress (MSP) and other standards based tests (TRC, DIBELS, DRP)?

Answers:

Student A: I feel great. Because it makes me learn how to understand the words and if I don't know what it means I can look at the dictionary after the test to find out what it means, because it's cheating if you look during the test.

Student B: They're hard. They make me worried.

Student C: I don't know. A little bit happy.

Student D: I feel like it's helpful for you but sometimes you get tired and you don't really want to do it. But it helps you so you do it.

Student E: I don't like them, but I try my best.

Question 5: Do you know how you scored on those tests?

Answers:

Student A: Not that much. I have to explain it to my parents and I understand it sometimes.

Student B: No.

Student C: Yes. My teachers explain it to me.

Student D: I see the scores but I don't know what they mean.

Student E: Good.

Question 6: Why do you think students take those tests?

Answers:

Student A: We take the test to understand.

Student B: To see what we learned over the year.

Student C: To get well on the reading.

Student D: To see if the students understand about math, reading, social studies, or science.

Student E: I don't know.

Question 7: Have you worked with a Safety Net teacher or before school group? What do you work on in those groups?

Answers:

Student A: We work on math. Like the math we do in class. It's different because we don't look at the board we just do it. We have to get the answer before the teacher gives it to you.

Student B: We do packets. We read books. We watch movies. It sort of helped.

Student C: Different things at the reading groups. Because we get to read a new book.

Student D: Math and reading. In math we do the same thing as our homework and understand it better. In reading we read a book and then a packet to understand and we get to watch movies like Sarah, Plain and Tall. The book was really interesting so we watched a movie.

Question 8: Why do you think you go to those groups?

Answers:

Student A: To get better at math.

Student B: To get extra practice.

Student D: I think I go to understand more about math or reading.

Question 9: What are learning difficulties you've had at school?

Answers:

Student A: Science and social studies are kind of confusing. There's a lot of things that happen so I get messed up. To do the average in science experiments is hard. There's a lot of other people like the colonies and others, they kind of have the same life. There's a lot. The words (vocabulary) are hard to understand.

Student B: Social Studies is hard. The projects are hard.

Student C: Writing. After I write my hand hurts. Sometimes hard for the order and spelling of words.

Student D: I don't really get it in science until we do the hand motions or talk and walk with our partners.

Student E: CBA (Classroom Based Assessment) and Social Studies is hard. Writing is hard.

Question 10: What are other difficulties you've had at school?

Answers:

Student A: Words that you read in a book and the teacher reads in a book. Some of the vocabulary words are hard to know what it means. Nothing else.

Student B: Math sometimes is hard.

Student C: ELL

Student D: Science and social studies are hard until the teacher explains more about it.

Question 11: What has helped you succeed at school?

Answers:

Student A: Strategies like using my time. Doing the daily comprehension work. That was helped me so I can get good grades on my reading test when we took the MSP. That makes me practice.

Student B: Speech has been a big help. Helped me sound out words and learn the sounds.

Student C: When my teacher helps me.

Student D: Teachers that help. Reviewing the stuff so we can get it more, like the vocabulary to understand what the lesson is about.

Student E: Reading more. My teacher has us give a thumbs up or thumbs down if we understand, so they can help us if we understand.

Analysis

Hmong culture and history in Southeast Asia

My first section of interview questions sought to find comparisons and differences between the culture and educational systems of Southeast Asia compared to the lives of students at JME. From the interviews I discovered that all Hmong students interviewed were born in Thailand and had come to America in the last ten years.

In asking questions related to life in Southeast Asia, I found further support of an agrarian lifestyle, focusing first on providing for the needs of the family. For instance, Student E shared, “My Mom never went to school (Thailand).” Student E went on to share that in America, “My Mom tried school, but had no baby sitters, so she had to stop school.” This student explained how their mother never attended school, because of the need to work for the family. Students who could remember more, explained that farming was still much a part of their lives, with some students working at the farms even at young ages.

From their brief experience and understanding of Thai schools, I was able to learn more of the specific experiences of our Hmong JME students. Many recalled how

discipline was different, with responses focusing on the use of sticks, hitting students for wrong answers and bad behavior. Through interview questions I also came to learn that the Hmong students who did attend school, went to learn the Thai language primarily, with not as much focus on other content areas. From the timeline for immigration, I know that those who attended school in Thailand, would have been in the American equivalent of kindergarten. Thus comparisons to American schools like JME are harder to make, since the students were so young when they attended and had fewer school experiences. However, one student was able to recall the style of teaching and learning at Thai schools. Student E recalled, "School was good but we had a big group and you had to use the pointer to answer questions. You go up one at a time. No projects. You stay with the whole class. Recess you get to play. Teacher talked a lot. Students one at a time answering questions. Teachers were mean and strict." This response provided a partial explanation to Hmong students' reluctance to participate in cooperative learning. I know a major reason why teachers at JME observe Hmong students hesitating to participate in groups, deals with students' confidence with language, particularly their Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). However, knowing that students' first school experiences and the educational experiences of their parents centered on independent and whole class work may help teachers as they implement the commonly used practices of cooperative learning.

These first series of questions confirmed the research done of culture, life, and schooling in Southeast Asia. Specifically it provided further support that historically, higher importance had been placed on providing for the needs of the family and not education, with some parents, students, and family members not attending school in

Southeast Asia. Finally, the interviews revealed discrepancies in the style of teaching and learning between Thai schools and JME.

Home and Family Support

The next series of questions centered on the responsibilities and support at home, the academic history and support of family members, as well as the beliefs and feelings of education at home. Both the interviews and my own experiences confirm that families are very supportive of Hmong students pursuing their education at JME. Student A shared that their responsibilities at home include homework in addition to chores and “Work at the farm in the summer and on Saturdays when they’re so busy selling flowers and vegetables at the markets.” While all interviewees shared they had chores and other household responsibilities, they consistently shared their parents desire for them to complete their homework.

After learning of the family support for education, I asked students about their parents’ understanding of what they’re learning and ability to help. Student B shared, “They kind of know what’s happening.” This was a consistent response with parents learning of school happenings in an inconsistent manner; both from what students share as well as school conferences when interpreters are present. When it is apparent that parents do understand, they are very supportive of work towards educational goals. For instance, Student D shared, “They understand how I’m doing at conferences. Like my dad told me to work harder on reading after the conference.” Here was evidence that through conferences parents were able to focus their home support in the area of reading. There were also examples of how parents understood more specific goals when student E shared, “She knows we’re not reaching our goal. My little brother needs help

pronouncing letters like the ‘T’ sound.” Another example of a family demonstrating understanding of areas for their student to grow was found in Student A’s response; “They tell me to read the dictionary to understand words. They want me to know my time tables and math facts. They know I need to learn more about writing.” These responses were very encouraging to see parents remembering growth goals from conferences and communicating them with their child.

After learning of the support parents and family have for education I inquired what the level of education was in the student’s support structure. Most students shared that their families could read or write in Thai and a few in Hmong, understandably since the written Hmong language is less than fifty years old (Vang X. , 2011). Most home support comes from older siblings who have learned English. However, some Hmong parents are still able to help, as Student D shares, “I get help with math. My dad teach me math.” Student E shared, “My Mom tried school, but had no baby sitters, so she had to stop school.” This response shows how parents want to continue their own education to help; however, due to circumstances, some related to immigration, they are unable to help.

These responses provided helpful insight to the state of family and home support for Hmong students at JME. This was especially helpful considering the research connecting family support with Hmong students’ academic success; “For Hmong immigrants...parents’ educational backgrounds, their pre-arrival education from refugee camps or native countries and their perceptions of the American educational system played roles in their children’s academic achievement” (2010, p29).

Language

Focusing specifically on issues related to language, I asked students questions related to learning English, challenges with the language, and their role as a bilingual speaker. Through the interview process, I learned that all students interviewed learned to speak when they first came to JME, starting anywhere from preschool to first grade. Most students expressed difficulty learning English. For instance, Student B shared, “It was hard. The sounds were hard.” When asked about the challenges they encountered learning English, students mentioned the sounds. Teaching of the sounds, or more commonly known as phonemic and phonological awareness, is an essential step in teaching children to read (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). However, with very different sounds between Hmong and English, Hmong students feel the increased difficulty. Some Hmong students have had an especially difficult time with differentiating the sounds in English, and have had additional support from Speech and Language Pathologists. After asked what has helped them succeed at school, Student B shared “Speech has been a big help. Helped me sound out words and learn the sounds.”

Student C, when asked about challenges learning English, shared it was hard “Because I was shy. It kind of made it easier when there were other Hmong students with me.” This response addresses the role of bilingualism at school. Many students are overwhelmed by English when they first come to JME; however, are able to relax when they have opportunities to speak Hmong. When asked when they speak Hmong at school, all interviewees shared they speak Hmong at recess. A few students mentioned they speak Hmong occasionally in the classroom or in the ELL room. After asking if they felt it would help to speak more Hmong at school, Student A shared “No. It helped me when I was younger. In first grade I could wait to speak Hmong at recess. I speak Hmong when

my friends speak to me in Hmong. My Dad tells me when I'm in school to speak English all the time. At my house I should only speak Hmong. That way I won't get messed up." Student E shared similarly, "My Mom said we should talk in English. But at recess and with friends we can talk Hmong." Student C shared "No. Because I need to learn more English." These answers reveal most parents' beliefs and apparently students' beliefs that the language of the classroom should be limited to English. However, when asked if they felt it would help them if their teachers could speak Hmong part of the time, all students shared they felt it would greatly help them understand confusing concepts.

Students were also asked if the strategies and skills learned from their time in the ELL program was helpful. Students shared that there were similarities to the classroom; however, several differences. Student C shared, "I go everyday. Same things as classroom but done differently." The different methods were explained by Student B, "It was reading and sometimes writing. We sang songs. The songs kind of helped. The hand motions helped." After inquiring if they felt the strategies helped, Student A shared "Yes. It helps me because they kinda in the classroom is kind of what we learn in here, so it helps you understand."

Overall, these interview questions reveal that language continues to be a major factor in the growth and development of Hmong students at JME.

Community Programs

The majority of Hmong students at JME and all students interviewed live in a Housing and Urban Development (HUD) apartment complex known as the Kirkland Heights. Students who live at Kirkland Heights have opportunities to participate in the Kirkland Boys & Girls Club (Boys and Girls Club of King County Kirkland Branch,

2011) as well as community activities in the Kirkland Heights community room, sponsored by Antioch Bible Church (Hughes, 2011). As the majority of their out-of-school time is spent with these community programs, students were asked a variety of questions related to how they spend their time with these organizations and perceptions of the programs themselves.

When asked, all students shared they attended the Boys & Girls Club on a continuum from occasionally to frequently. At the Boys & Girls Club students shared they go there straight from school, with the first hour being called “Power Hour,” consisting solely of time to work on homework. Students shared they get help from workers on their homework if they need it, sometimes working in small groups on a similar school assignments. Following homework, students shared they participated in a variety of games and computer lab time. Student A shared “We play volleyball and have a team.” When asked how their parents feel about the Boys & Girls Club, all students shared their parents were highly supportive. Student A shared, “They like Boys & Girls Club because it helps us with our homework and go on field trips. They help the Kirkland Heights people.” Student D said, “They feel good about it because we get our homework done there.” Also, Student E shared, “My Mom really likes us to go to Boys & Girls Club because we get all our homework done there.”

Students shared that their time in the Kirkland Heights community room consisted of a variety of activities year round. There are monthly movie nights and other events like game nights. During the school year there are sometimes homework clubs and in the summer, more frequent meetings for reading, school work, and games. Students shared there is also a “Jesus Club” that meets in the summer, as well as other summer activities.

When asked about parent opinions of activities at the Kirkland Heights, students shared their parents let them go and have mixed feelings. Whether it's related to a church-based organization, or the occasional element of crime at the Kirkland Heights, the students didn't know. Student A shared, "My Mom and Dad don't always want us to go to Kirkland Heights events, but sometimes they let us go. Because they want us to stay and learn. It's sometimes dangerous at Kirkland Heights."

Through interviews, it is very apparent that the majority of Hmong JME students' out-of-school time is spent between the Boys & Girls Club and events at the Kirkland Heights. There are clearly educational programs and activities in place that both students and parents feel is helpful in completing school work.

Academic Achievement

The final theme of interview questions centered on the different assessment systems in place, including standards based tests, as well as the reporting of student progress. Through the interviews all intermediate students expressed their understanding of the report card and standards based assessment system. In most cases students were able to articulate close to the actual language of the school district's standards. For instance, Student B shares, "A one is below grade level, a two is the same, a three is at standard, and a four is beyond standard. Standard means at grade level." Student E expressed it a little differently by answering, "A one is like you're not getting it, a two is you're not trying, a three is you're at standard, a four is above standard." Most responses here show students understand what it means to be "at standard." However, other levels, particularly in the grades of ones and twos, there is confusion.

When asked if students understood the different content and skill areas addressed on the report cards, students had mixed understandings. Student D shared, “I understand it when it has the words like math, reading, and (core subjects). I don’t really understand the sub-categories (informational/literary text).” This and other responses revealed student don’t fully understand the reporting system. Furthermore, when students were asked if they know how they scored on standards based tests like the state test, the Measurement of Student Progress (MSP), many students expressed they were unaware or confused by the results. Many have never seen the results, and those who have, are unable to interpret what they mean. When asked if they knew how they scored on the tests, Student A responded, “Not that much. I have to explain it to my parents and I understand it sometimes.” Student D went on to share, “I see the scores but I don’t know what they mean.” The MSP is an extremely important test for schools like JME, as it is the basis for school evaluation, and scores are used to plan instruction and student groups each year. This data shows students are unaware of their overall progress related to state testing in particular.

Finally students were asked a series of questions related to areas they have encountered difficulty. Most students identified content areas that dealt with a lot of background knowledge or vocabulary. Student A shared, “Some of the vocabulary words are hard to know what it means.” Student D said, “Science and social studies are hard until the teacher explains more about it.” Student B agreed, by sharing “Social studies is hard. The projects are hard.” These responses address the challenge for Hmong students at JME to develop their vocabulary, specifically their Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP).

Implications

Through the process of analyzing all the data and student responses, there are several implications for practices of JME staff and teachers. One such recommendation is to focus on supporting students in transitions from whole group to cooperative learning. The data revealed educational experiences from Thailand for some students and families of students to be a teacher-centered classroom, with little cooperative learning. Since there is a great deal of cooperative learning that takes place at JME, teachers and staff need to be aware of this shift in thinking for Hmong students. JME staff should be mindful of the educational background some Hmong students might have. Staff should also continue to encourage students to engage in cooperative learning, while students balance timidity with language in both BICS and CALP. Further research from parents or older Hmong students would also help this understanding of similarities and differences between Thai schools and JME.

The data revealed that parents had much deeper understanding of student progress and how to support their child through conferences with an interpreter present. Thus, a recommendation would be to have more frequent parent conferences with interpreters. Furthermore, these conferences should include parent training with strategies for parents to support their child's academic progress, as well as what to look for during "homework time."

Another revelation from the interviews was the struggle many Hmong students have with learning English related to sounds. Knowing that Hmong students have not been exposed to the same sounds as native English speakers, leads to the recommendation that extra attention must be placed on teaching phonemic and

phonological awareness. As these types of awareness are directly related to a child's ability to read and learn the English language, early intervention and focus must be placed on phonemic and phonological awareness.

The data revealed students' perceptions that ELL strategies were helpful for learning. The strategies included bodily/kinesthetic movement, the use of graphic organizers, and multiple intelligences. These are practices that students expressed they do not always see in the general classroom. Thus, to continue the necessary catch up growth for Hmong students at JME, classroom teachers must be committed to implement similar strategies used in ELL classrooms. Students went on to share the content used in ELL was similar to the classroom. This shows the importance for continued collaboration between classroom and ELL teachers to match up content areas where possible to build background knowledge.

There are already systems in place to support students with their academics outside the school day. To see further growth, the JME staff needs to collaborate with organizations like the Boys & Girls Club and the events held at the Kirkland Heights. Knowing that there is a team assisting and supporting students for at least one hour each day at Boys & Girls Club, as well homework clubs at the Kirkland Heights, JME staff need to evaluate what homework pieces to send home. Whether the materials are for re-teaching math lessons, or flashcards to develop understanding of sight words and sound blends, evaluating the materials used could greatly impact students' academic growth.

There is a need for continued effort to explain the grading and assessment systems to both students and families. Through student responses it was apparent that students understood the meaning of standard; however, did not grasp what a level one or two score

implied. This is important, in that JME has historically seen Hmong students get scores of ones and twos. If students think a two means, as Student E explained, “You’re not trying” the academic progress could be halted. Furthermore, as students are often the ones interpreting and explaining academic progress to parents, it is imperative that students have clear understandings of the grading system.

The data also revealed mixed understandings with report card language, specifically what the content and skill areas meant. All students should have an understanding of how they are progressing. However, this is even more important for our Hmong students who often have to explain to their parents what each report card categories mean. If we hope to see progress in those academic areas, students need to know what the categories mean.

While this study addressed many aspects to my research question of what is the educational experience for Hmong students at JME, I am left with more questions. In the literature review I shared the dilemma Christopher Vang faces, as he shared that “the majority of Hmong students have been living in the U.S. for quite some time and are still not doing well in school” (Vang, 2010, p. 32). For this study I focused on our Hmong students at JME who have immigrated within the last ten years and have been a part of the ELL program. However, we have numerous families at JME who have lived in the United States for more than one generation and are still not performing at standard. With all the Hmong refugee camps closed, and no new Hmong immigrants coming to JME, how does the JME staff ensure that future generations from American-born Hmong families experience academic success?

Conclusion

This study began with the reality that a large percentage of Hmong students at JME have historically performed below standard on district and state standardized tests. This is still the reality. There have been numerous studies looking at the factors contributing to the success of Hmong students in states like Minnesota, Wisconsin, and California. However, research has not been collected to assess the educational experiences for Hmong students at JME in Kirkland, WA. There are numerous challenges these students encounter as they strive to grow academically. I sought to see how their family and personal experiences from Southeast Asia, as well as family and home support in America influenced their academic journey. I endeavored to learn of the challenges and experiences surrounding language and academic achievement. I also desired to know the other educational influences on these students from community programs and organizations.

Through this case study I learned a great deal about the educational experience for Hmong students at JME. I learned that Hmong students at JME have had to make many transitions from life in Southeast Asia as well as the educational experiences their families had. I discovered that parents and families are highly supportive of students' education at JME and are willing and eager to support their child's growth with communication on their academic progress and strategies to continue the growth. I also discovered the importance of collaboration with ELL classrooms and concentrated effort with phonemic and phonological awareness for Hmong students in English language development. The study also revealed the incredible work being done by community organizations and the need for JME staff to collaborate with these organizations. Finally,

I learned that additional training and conversations need to take place concerning Hmong students' academic progress, with both students and parents more fully understanding the language of the systems in place.

This study concluded that to help Hmong students at John Muir Elementary meet academic standards, consistent collaboration with parents, teachers, students, and community organizations needs to occur to maintain clear understandings of systems and strategies as well as accountability for academic progress.

The search for the educational experience of Hmong students at John Muir Elementary in Kirkland, WA is a search that is not yet complete. The findings of this study must be shared with JME staff and changes implemented and further questions asked, to see the lasting growth and achievement of this incredible community of learners.

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