

Educating Hmong Immigrants:
Community Alliance for Hmong Education (CAHE)

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Issue Assessment

Introduction and Overview of the Issue:

Immigration is by no means a simple issue. At its heart immigration involves incredible risks, intense change, high hopes, harsh realities, and new opportunities. The experience is full of paradoxical conjectures as people leave behind their old homes and enter into a new culture and society. The United States has been actively coping with immigration as an integral part of its society for centuries. The historical and contemporary reasons for immigration range from economic to political to social. Some people come to the United States in search of jobs; others come as a result of war, others to escape from societal oppression in their home country (Glenn 3). From the first wave of European settlers to recent 21st century refugees from war-stricken countries, there arises a rich array of challenges and opportunities.

Transcending the particulars of any one case – all immigrants undergo an intense period of life change during the process of immigration. For children especially this has an extreme impact. All sense of immediate stability is put on hold. Yet, the child of an immigrant family arriving in the United States does receive a unique opportunity for entry in American society – the public school. The role of American public schools in the immigrant experience is a significant one. Schools become a space for guaranteed learning and socializing and as the child attempts to balance the multifaceted changing world around them, schools ideally offer a combination of stability and friendly faces.

The real question to be asked is whether or not the American public school system does fulfill this rather idealistic role in the life of the immigrant child. It becomes a difficult task to review the centuries of historical successes and failures of immigrant

populations. It varies by decade, state, school, and person. There is no clear cut formulaic response to the huge and diverse question of how to best aid the issues facing a contemporary immigrant. Despite this, there is the opportunity for the expansion of resources and approaches in the face of this question. Building upon past methods as outlined by both the host populations and the input from the immigrant populations themselves public schools can move towards a twenty first century model of education that is based on a philosophy grounded in non-racist techniques, culturally responsive undertones, and a community and holistically oriented focus. The entire community of learning comes together within this framework, one that is centered on re-working and re-envisioning the role of public schools, the role of the community, and a solidified connection between the two.

Project Focus:

The Hmong culture group and their experience in the United States will be at the heart of this project. While the fate of each immigrant is integrally important, the task of outlining and defining a reform initiative for all immigrants would be far too challenging. In fact, a universal reform effort for all immigrants would be counter-intuitive to the approach of this project, one that focuses on specific experiences and moves away from standardized and ubiquitous efforts. This does not mean that the lessons to be gained from inquiry into other population groups will be ignored. Rather, an attempt will be made to glean and gather both the mistakes and gains that have been made in the past in order to most successfully aid in the smooth transitions of new Hmong immigrants.

Background of the Hmong People:

The Hmong language was not put into written form until the twentieth century, so all accounts of their history come from a long line of oral traditions (Bliatout 1). The

passing of their history is thus a deeply embedded cultural tradition based on a community of relational learning. According to this oral history, they are an ancient culture who originated in Asia and lived in what is now central-China for over 4,000 years. Due to their status as a minority group in China, they endured centuries of oppression (Kaufman 85). Approximately two hundred years ago they fled to from China to Vietnam, and Laos. According to one source “Those who reached Laos from southern China are the ancestors of the Hmong who have recently come to America in the same quest for freedom” (Bliatout 3).

The Hmong in Laos led a farming subsistence based life style, growing their own food and building their homes using natural resources. When they first arrived there, for the most part they lived in total isolation from the peoples of Laos, but eventually they began to have more of a relationship based on friendship and sympathy. In 1972 there were a recorded 300,000 Hmong living in Laos, which made up approximately 10 percent of the countries total population. Their agriculture expanded, and they participated in the economy of growing and selling poppy for opium (Bliatout 3).

It was not until the Vietnam War that relations between the Laotians and the Hmong erupted into violence. Beginning in the 1960’s Hmong soldiers were recruited by the United States CIA to serve as units in a “secret army.” In the vital border between Laos and Vietnam the Hmong units were used to aid the US army and at its peak point over 30,000 Hmong villagers acted in this alliance. During the Vietnam War thousands of Hmong died - civilians and soldier alike. In 1975 when the United States army withdrew from Vietnam the Laotian communist government seized control or the nation’s power, putting the remaining Hmong population in grave danger (Kaufman 88). A massive genocidal threat ensued and in 1975 they were forced to flee the country. A surge of

Hmong immigrants to various locations across the world began. Some remained in Laos, hidden away in jungle locations, others fled across the Laos border into Thailand, and the majority has made the journey to the United States. The first Hmong immigrants to come to the United States arrived in January of 1976. One hundred and fifty families, a total of seven hundred and fifty people, made up the first wave of immigrants to cross over to America (Bliatout 7).

From this point on there have been several rolling waves of populations to arrive in the US from the Thai based refugee camps. They have spread across the nation – usually congregating in particular states such as Minnesota and California. In Minnesota there are approximately 60,000 Hmong currently living in the twin cities and Rochester (<www.unitedwaytwincities.org>). Minnesota has become a general meeting point for Hmong families.

There will be an estimated 5,000 Hmong Immigrants arriving in Minnesota at the end of 2004. This most recent group of immigrants will be directly discussed in this reform effort. It must be recognized that a path for these new immigrants has already been forged – and the efforts must now be deepened and expanded based upon past experiences and future prospects. Their immanent and fast approaching arrival calls for an intense focus and analysis of the ways in which the Hmong have had trouble adjusting to American society, and what specific programs have been established already to aid in this transition.

Adjustment Problems in the US, Connections in the Classroom, and Efforts in the Twin Cities:

Culture shock is one of the first things that a person encounters on entering a new society. In his book “Mong Education at the Crossroads” Paoze Thao defines culture shock as:

“a phenomenon when one finds himself/herself in the middle of a new culture in which cues are difficult or impossible to interpret which produces feelings of disorientation, inadequacy, or isolation” (74).

It is most likely that each of the new Hmong immigrants will experience some type of culture shock. It is an emotional and sometimes physical response to the change. It is a feeling of intense confusion and disorientation as any person, young and old alike, transitions from their place of birth into their new home. Coupled with this initial shock there will most likely also be an array of other emotions – confusion, depression, anger, resentment. Culture shock is a subjective experience – and may last for a week, a month, or a year. Though this does not relate to a purely academic setting, it does undoubtedly impact school age children and their ability to perform in the classroom.

The biggest, and possibly most pressing and debilitating of adjustment problems arises with the existing language barrier. Some Hmong in the Thai Refugee camps have learned English as part of their education, but for many they arrive in US with little to no ability to communicate in English. According to a recent Wilder Research Center survey it was found that the Hmong surveyed were the most likely to have trouble learning English in comparison to other recent immigrants (“Immigrant Snap Shots” 2).

Researchers and linguists have compiled and identified key phonetic and grammatical differences between the two languages, which can be used to aid ESL teachers in confronting the differences between the Hmong and English languages (Bliatout 49).

Another difficulty is that Hmong was not a written language until the 1950’s, and as Judy

Smith-David said in her article *New Immigrant Students Need More than ESL*: “most of the children come from preliterate homes.” Hmong, on the bright side, is one of the eight languages taught in US school districts (also included are Spanish, Vietnamese, Cantonese, Cambodian, Korean, Laotian, and Navajo) (22).

According to the official St. Paul public school website, <<http://www.stpaul.k12.mn.us>>, the St. Paul public school system has created a system of Transitional Language Centers (TLCs) in Como Park, Hayden Heights and Phalen Lake for students in grades K-6. Every TLC has a set-up of five classrooms, with a total capacity for one hundred and twenty five students. Each class is bi-lingual, and both the teachers and the support staff are fluent in both Hmong and English. Two new TLCs are scheduled to open in January 2005, in areas near where the new Hmong immigrants are expected to settle. The TLCs serve as a bridge program for the new students, and are used as a short term, small, and specifically oriented transitional setting within traditionally elementary schools. Once students are ready, as determined by the teachers, they move on to the school’s English Language Learner program (ELL). Older Hmong students, 7th through 12th entering the US usually attend St. Paul’s International Academy, a part of LEAP, where they are allowed to remain until they graduate. As described by the St. Paul Public School website in TLCs and the International Academy:

“Students will also study the subject areas that all other Saint Paul students are learning--reading, writing, math, science, social studies, art, music, physical education, etc., as they work toward state and district standards. The curriculum is based on state and ELL standards, which will assist students in their transition to mainstream school. The TLC and IA-LEAP programs will emphasize basic interpersonal communications skills in English, though Hmong bilingual support

will also be available for students and families” ([www.spps.org/ Frequently_Asked_Questions.html](http://www.spps.org/Frequently_Asked_Questions.html)).

As the TLC program demonstrates, the St. Paul public school system has taken significant strides to accommodate the new Hmong students. Still, this program does mimic the standard approach for ESL in the United States, where for the most part ESL and ELL programs focus on total English acquisition, and have little focus on the development of literacy skills and communication in the students’ native language. Under a more holistic approach, it has been determined that it is only through an understanding of the primary child’s language and an acceptance of the different strategies taken culturally to appropriate languages that English can be taught effectively (Thao 105). With their typical assimilation into US culture the Hmong language is often pushed to the background, as ESL/ELL programs (which often disregard and disrespect native language and address them as tack-on portions to the programs) take center stage.

Beyond language differences, there are other key cultural differences that come in conflict between Hmong and American society. To begin, traditional family structures typically emphasize extended family units, and in China and Laos they lived in clan community structures. There were clearly defined roles for various members of the family, and direct lines of power (i.e. gender relations, age relations, etc...). In the United States a nuclear family is emphasized, and often Hmong clans are not able to live in such condensed and collective environments (Thao 77)). The social ties that characterized their life both traditionally and in the Thai Refugee camps are dissolved as they search for affordable housing and jobs in the US. Also, typically the males of the Hmong community are the main family providers. In the US two incomes are usually needed to support the family in a capitalistic setting. With women taking on new roles in the work

force, and daughters entering school where gender equality is emphasized internal stress within the family unit begins (Thao, “Mong Education at the Crossroads”).

There are also extremely large differences between traditional Hmong education and the US public school system. It was not until the 1950’s that a formal schooling system was introduced in Laos, along with a formal written language (Collignon, Men, Ten 31). Before this, education was:

“learned orally from their parents or from the wise men in the village. They were taught to respect authority of the adult who was teaching them. They learned their traditional sung poetry, religious incantations, and instrumental music and memorized the techniques of their textile art through repetition...” (31).

When an education system was introduced in the Laotian villages, it was predominantly influenced by a French theology with a top-down approach, an emphasis on rote-memorization, physical punishment, and deference to authority (31). Both traditional and Laotian forms of education are quite different from those found in the United States.

The above is a mere outline of the various issues and concerns affecting Hmong Immigrants. From culture shock to gender expectations there is a wide array of concerns facing the new Hmong immigrants, and those who are preparing to help them transition into American society. Before I move into my own reform initiative I will do a brief overview of some of the various forms of public scholarship that currently are in existence that have helped to aid Hmong immigrants.

Current Public Scholarship – Looking to other for support and ideas:

Minnesota has been gearing up, preparing for, and grappling with immigration issues for decades. When Hmong populations first started to arrive there arose a distinct

need for social services, non-profits, and public scholarship to aid in the entrance of the Hmong. This next section of this assessment will focus on some of the key organizations and guidebooks that surfaced during the research of this project.

In the late 1980' a Handbook for Teaching Hmong-Speaking Students was written Bliatout, Downing, Lewis, and Yang, and was published in coordination with the "Transition Program for Refugee Children." The book contained a detailed history and a specific set of learning guidelines meant to increase the awareness of a teacher with Hmong speaking children in his/her classroom. The authors brought up an array of important issues that dealt directly with Hmong history, and the cultural implications of these things for a Hmong learner. Also, it contained a detailed phonetic and linguistic guide to the Hmong language for teachers. Overall, the function of the text is to provide a well thought out analysis of the ways in which a Hmong speaking student can be best accommodated for in the classroom.

Beyond the book scholarship that has taken place in response to Hmong immigration there are also numerous organizations that have either been specifically created, or have incorporated issues into their pre-existing missions. Across the twin cities there are support systems that have been established that act as liaisons between the Hmong populations and the American public. They intersect with and build upon the support offered by schools.

One of these organizations is the Greater Twin Cities United Way. Their mission statement is that the:

"Greater Twin Cities United Way brings together caring people to help others, to address tough local issues and to create a better place for all of us to live. We work hard to make sure people have the education, jobs, shelter, food and health

they need to be successful. United Way is dedicated to working with the community they serve to provide better services and situations for all people.

(www.unitedwaytwincities.org)

Mainly the program looks to the twin cities community for both fiscal and volunteer support. They act as a way to get information and facts out to the twin cities that will increase awareness and compassion about immigrant issues.

More specifically, there is the Hmong American Partnership (HAP), a non-profit organization that was formed in 1990. HAP draws on the resources and strengths of both the Hmong American community, and the host American population. Their mission is to “foster trust; to assist Hmong in achieving their full potential and participating actively in the community; and to promote mutual respect, cultural awareness, and the exchange of knowledge and values.” Included in the organizations goals are the prevention of Hmong youth from entrance into drug/crime practices and helping to improve their academic achievement. One of their programs is Hmong Youth Pride (HYP), an after school program that works with students and volunteer aids to improve student grades, self esteem, and help them avoid drug and alcohol abuse (<http://www.hmong.org/index.asp>).

Another, more public example of the twin cities dedication to creating a visible presence and dedication to this issue can be found at the Science Museum of Minnesota. Amongst the hands-on experiments and dinosaur displays inside of the museum, there is a model of a Hmong house, built by Hmong community members. When you enter the house there is a time line that outlines Hmong history; a TV screen with running oral commentary from community elders about what coming to the United States meant to them, and what their traditional life was like before immigration; and a corner with

traditional outfits and mirrors so that children can, quite literally, see themselves in other people's shoes. This exhibit holds a two fold message that speaks to the heart this reform. Education for immigrants must involve not only an actualization of the immigrant themselves but also the opportunity for others to truly begin to empathize with the immigrant experience and expand their world views.

Conclusions:

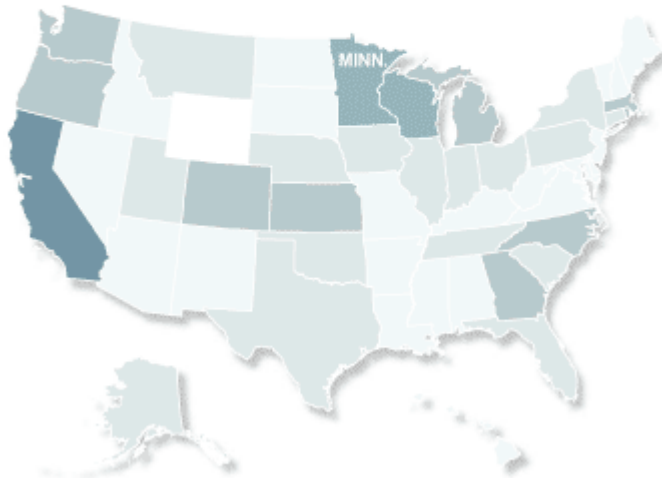
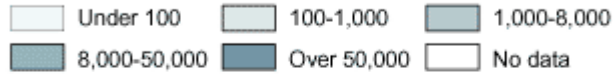
The last example explored in the previous sections highlights the collaboration of ideas, efforts, and commitment that is needed to create a comprehensive immigrant education program in light of the 5,000 people who will be arriving in Minnesota before the year is over. Though a house in a museum seems slightly paradoxical, it does demonstrate what can be done through hands-on educational moments that respect and embrace key Hmong traditions of community and cross-generational understanding. Essentially it is important to keep each of these key issues in mind as the paper moves into the next portion – the reform initiative section. All of the past examples serve to create the basis for this reform initiative, one that harnesses the energy of immigration and works collaboratively to make Minnesota's public schools as open, responsive, and ready for its new learners as they can possible be.

A final image:

New wave of Hmong head to U.S.

About 15,000 Hmong immigrants from a refugee camp in Thailand are expected to arrive in the United States over the next six months. The State Department predicts 5,000 of those will end up in Minnesota.

Hmong population in the United States (2000)



SOURCE: Census Bureau, 2000

AP

Now is the time to move beyond the two dimensional maps and the numbers that float in the news and move towards a phase of multi-dimensional approaches that facilitate change and discovery.

REFORM INITIATIVE

Project Proposal:

My reform initiative will focus on the development of a non-profit organization centered on community congruence. Unlike existing community organizations, such as Untied

Way and HAP, this organization will have a narrowed focus, mainly putting its energies into creating a coalition between Hmong communities and the twin cities public schools. Ultimately, the non-profit will provide for a space wherein a collective channel of energies can be formed that will in turn be used to help aid the Hmong populations arriving in 2004/2005. The organization will go through a multi-phase process, changing its focus over the years to respond to the long term needs of the Hmong American population and their partners in the Twin Cities. The organization, as it is represented here, is only the beginning framework and will act as a foundational guiding force. The true organization will only be given life and power from those members who participate in its creation, facilitation, and longevity.

Why a community organization?

The format for a community based organization (CBO) was chosen because they provide for a unique opportunity to bring together and create dialogue between groups of people that might otherwise never have the chance to have intense socialization and dialogue. Using a similar format to another CBO created in New England, the one designed in this reform will “engage multiple partners in sustainable education initiatives [that] result in gains for students and their families at the community, interpersonal, and personal levels” (Collignon Men, Tan 27). Though family involvement in formal schools is a relatively new concept for the Hmong, it is necessary that parents have an active role in their children’s education (32). In order to help bridge the gaps between home life and school culture, and ensure that neither parents nor their children get “left behind,” CBOs essentially bridge the gap between the two parts of a child’s life.

Studies have shown that immigrant parents often have higher educational expectations for their children when compared to other native minorities. (Hao and

Bonstead-Bruns 176). These high expectations for success have been hypothesized to have increased positive effects on student outcomes. Coupled with this however, there are often frustrations felt by most immigrant parents that they have insufficient knowledge as to how American schools actually work. They often feel an extreme disconnection from the school process and are unable to maneuver through the school bureaucracy (Collignon, Men, and Tan 36). Similarly, the constructions of most ELL programs teach primarily towards English proficiency and often ignore the child's first language. This leaves parents in an isolated realm away from the school. Public schools themselves often do not have the time, money, or energy to put into creating specific programs to incorporate the voices of specific populations, such as Hmong immigrants, into their educational planning and curriculum building process. A CBO, however, can be used to fulfill this specific goal and can be fully dedicated to this need of not only bringing the Hmong voice into the school building, but also can bring the school voice into the Hmong community.

Mission Statement:

Community Alliances for Hmong Education (CAHE) is a multi-faceted organization, dedicated to the collection of resources to help aid recent and already settled Hmong immigrants. Within CAHE's mission the definition of resources is expanded to include everything from people to historical traditions. At its heart CAHE works towards the facilitation of dialogue between parents, children, teachers, administrators, and other community members. Through dialogue and collective envisioning all parties will be able to come to a better understanding of how to best educate immigrant children, ensuring that they are not lost in the public schools system, and are afforded every opportunity available for their success.

CAHE Goals:

- (1) Give Hmong immigrant children every opportunity possible to succeed in the public school system and American society.
 - (2) To help Hmong parents understand the public school system, and come to better understanding of what to expect in their child's education.
 - (3) Inform St. Paul Public schools about what the Hmong community feels should be included in their children's education.
 - (4) Help teachers in TLC classrooms, ELL classrooms, and mainstream classrooms better understand Hmong history and background, and to aid them in how to best aid their students.
 - (5) Improve Hmong language proficiency and English Language Proficiency simultaneously.
 - (6) Support and foster a continued life long learning of Hmong history, tradition, and language.
 - (7) Include a broad range of community members over a long span of time.
 - (8) Begin to create a permanent collection of multi-media resources and recordings that will serve as a cultural preserver and resource center for teachers and administrators.
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Phase One: Preparation

Community Meetings:

In its beginning phases CAHE will call a series of community meetings. The collective ideas formed at these meetings, coupled with the organization's mission

statement and goals, will form the organizations main philosophy, and will be considered in all future endeavors. The following is an outline of specific audiences, goals, locations, formats, and agendas for each of the three sub-group of meetings to be called.

MONTH ONE: FORUM PREPARATION AND ENVISIONING (Individual Target Groups).

(I)

Target Audience: Already settled Hmong adults who have been living in the twin cities for more than three years.

Goals: To create and gather input from community members who have already experienced immigration and have had the experience of either assimilating or integrating into American society. As a group that has already undergone many of the adjustment problems that CAHE hopes to combat, this group is a primary source for inspiration and ideas.

Location: This meeting will be held at Como Park Elementary School, one of the original sites of a TLC program.

Meeting Format: The meeting will take place totally in Hmong, with no English translations. Two elderly community members (nominated at the meeting), one male and one female, will be the officiators. Though traditionally a meeting of this sort would be headed solely by a male having both genders in control from the very start of CAHE will hopefully begin to help break some of the cultural subjugation of women, promoting a respect that comes from seeing everyone work together towards a common goal.

The meeting itself will be structured to ensure a mutual respect, coupled with full opportunity for each attendee to have his/her voice heard. The officiators will sit on a slightly elevated platform, and all other chairs will be arranged in a circle (a tight double circle if need be). At the front of the room there will be a rolling chalkboard on which another community member will be taking notes. All meetings will be video and audio recorded, and saved in CAHE's official archives.

Publicity: Publication of the event will appear across the city in such places as: schools that currently have large Hmong student populations; in local libraries around neighborhoods where Hmong families live; Hmong grocery stores and restaurants, and local publications – from Hmong newspapers to the St. Paul Pioneer Press. Also, the date and time will be announced on local radio stations in Hmong, and in local churches.

Agenda:

Identify the following from the group's unique perspective:

- (1) Officiators define culture shock, according to the way it has been previously defined. Does the group agree with this? Can they identify with it? Have attendees share stories, from silly to grave, about their experiences with culture shock. What amazed/intimidated/shocked/pleased/surprised/confused them? If they could change something from their initial months in the US what would it be? Is there any way to traditionally represent culture shock (i.e. create a new oral poem or art form to express their emotional journey)?
- (2) Compile a list of these cultural differences that group members were "shocked" by. Questions: What are the main differences between their traditional Hmong culture and the US? What surprised them the most when they arrived in the United States? How did Minnesota differ from the Thai Refugee Camps? How

have things like technology and a capitalistic economy factored into their lives?

Have they felt a distance from their original cultural ties? [ALL OF THIS

MATERIAL WILL BE RECORDED AND SAVED TO BE USED LATER]

- (3) With the last question two questions in mind, what do they wish they had been told on their arrival? In retrospect, what could have been done to help them? From material possessions to nuggets of knowledge, what do they wish had been passed down to them? If possible, compile a list of tangible items, and possible information sources that they feel could be given to new immigrants.

(II)

Following the first meeting, a series of meetings held every Saturday afternoon will work towards the completion of the target goals (as identified later):

Target Audience: The second meeting will include the same target audience as the previous one, but will also be expanded to include Hmong youth currently in the twin cities public school system.

Goal: The goal of these meeting is to create “CAHE Cares” welcome baskets for recently immigrated community members. Secondly, the group will begin to work on creating new folklore and artistic representations of their journey in the United States.

Location and Publicity: Same as above. Publicity will be expanded so that every Hmong child in a TLC, ELL, and LEAP class goes home with a publicity flyer for the event.

Meeting Format: This meeting will begin with an introduction by the officiators, and then will break down into small group teams. Each of these teams will be comprised of anywhere from 2 to 5 family groups (depending on size of group). These groups will come up with a group name, and will be considered an extended ‘family unit’ for the rest

of their time in CAHE. The rationale of this is to attempt to mimic the extended family units in Hmong tradition, and create an ensured community for each individual family, so that they have people they can directly rely on during times of stress. Each ‘family group’ will be given a specific section of the room where they will then work together on the meetings agenda.

Agenda:

- (1) Formation of ‘family groups. Once this is done, there will be a getting to know one another session, during which CAHE volunteers and the meeting officiators will circulate and introduce various “ice breaker” games to begin to create trust and friendship amongst the groups. At all following meetings, the groups will automatically gather themselves in their family units, and begin the meetings with a group check-in.
- (2) While this is going on in one room, another room will be prepared with an assembly line of the resources and goods identified during the previous meeting for the “CAHE Cares” welcome baskets. After about a half an hour of small group bonding all attendees will reconvene and move into the next room, where they will begin to brainstorm about the best way to put the baskets together. The baskets will be left unsealed (additional items will be added later). Also, the children will be specifically in charge of creating greeting cards for the baskets, and thank you notes to those people who donated the supplies needed for the baskets.
- (3) Within the ‘family groups’ group members will decide on a way to culturally and traditionally express the anxieties they felt during their traditional move to

the United States. At each meeting, a significant portion of the time will be allotted to the development of these representations.

- (4) Begin discussion during all group wrap-up sessions about the ways in which attendees felt that the twin cities public school system has impacted them and aided their children. Each family group will select one volunteer to attend CAHE sessions with teachers and administrators.

(III.)

Target Audience: This series of meetings will target teachers and administrators. The officiators of these meetings will be one pre-selected teacher who has shown interest and a pre-selected community member from the Hmong community. Other Hmong community members will act as liaisons between the American teachers and the Hmong community.

Goals: The goals of this subset of meetings are to identify and expand the roles of the teacher in the Hmong American experience. A review of classroom tactics and school practice will also take place.

Location: These meetings will take place at Hayden Park, on of the other sites for a TLC program.

Publicity: CAHE will publicize the event heavily in all schools with a Hmong population. Teachers in TLC, ELL, and LEAP classrooms, as well as their administrators and all other school personnel will be strongly encouraged to attend. There will be flyers put out in all teacher mailboxes, as well as announcements at teacher meetings, local teacher union meetings, local publications/newspapers, and radio shows (i.e. NPR, MPR).

Meeting Format: Officiators will once again sit on slightly elevated platforms. The teachers will begin by sitting in rows of chairs, and will eventually break down into

smaller group circles. The meeting will also be video and audio recorded. There will be Hmong and English translators, so that information is equally accessible to all members.

Agenda:

- (1) Official welcoming and sharing of CAHE goals and philosophy.
- (2) Next will be a brief oral history portion, during which the Hmong officiator and other Hmong community members will give an account of Hmong history, and then briefly share their life story about their transition into the United States. This will be followed by a question and answer session.
- (3) The teachers will then split into small group teams, which will be identified as their own “family groups.” Over the course of the next several meetings these groups will begin to identify the key problems they have faced as educators in the public school classroom with the influx of Hmong students. Sample questions: How have they dealt with teaching ESL in their classroom? What types of problems have they dealt with? Do they think that TLC has been a good program? How do such programs as NCLB impact their classrooms? What kind of teacher preparation did they receive for their jobs? How do administrators deal with immigrant influxes in their schools? What do they see as the connection between the schools and the wider Hmong community?
- (4) The final portion of each meeting will be dedicated to an all group discussion of educational goals and priorities in the classroom. Using the input offered by the Hmong community, they will answer the following question: How can we make the classroom more responsive to aiding the Hmong transition into the classroom? In what ways can we, as educators, work towards a classroom that respects

traditional Hmong values, while also affording each child in the classroom equal opportunity to succeed in the United States?

- (5) Teachers and administrators will also identify key resources and tools that they think should be included in the “CAHE Cares” welcome baskets.

(III)

Target Audience: The target audience of this initial subset of meetings will be recently immigrated Hmong populations (two years and less), particularly parents of students in the public school system.

Goals: The primary goals of this set of meetings will be to aid in their transition into the US, outline their educational expectations for their children, and get them involved right away in an active participation in their children’s schools.

Location: The location of this meeting will be Phalen Lake, the site of a TLC program.

Publicity: Publication of the event will appear across the city in such places as: schools that currently have large Hmong student populations; in local libraries around neighborhoods where Hmong families live; Hmong grocery stores and restaurants, and local publications. Also, the date and time will be announced on local radio stations in Hmong, and in local churches. Also – CAHE will be in touch with those in charge at the Thai Refugee Camps, where people waiting to come to the US will be informed of the programs existence. Similarly, the organization will be in contact with the federal government, Hmong embassy, and other immigration organizations to see if they can assist in an early intervention publication of the event so that all immigrants who are on their way, or have recently arrived have access to CAHE and come to this meeting.

Meeting Format: This meeting will begin right away with ‘family group’ formations, and getting to know one another sessions. Following small group work, they will re-converge

and meeting officiators will explain CAHE, and lead a larger group informational session at the first meeting. All following meetings will usually start with a large group session, and then break down into the smaller groups to cover specific agenda items. Once again, the meetings will all be video and audio recorded when possible.

Agenda:

Meeting #1:

- (1) CAHE volunteers and meeting officiators will officially welcome and greet all members who are present. Immediately following this everyone will be split into ‘family groups’ in order to begin to build community bridging bonds right away.
- (2) After approximately half an hour the group will come back into the larger group for an “Orientation” to the twin cities. A prepared power point presentation, that contains topics such as: Welcome to the Twin Cities; Basics in English (Hello, Goodbye, and 1-2-3); How to Use the Metro; Where should I shop?; Social Services Available; and Insider Tips to Getting the Most out of your First Weeks. The power point will be written in *both* Hmong, and English. All items will be read in a clear voice for the benefit of those who cannot read. The power point will be followed by a break down session where CAHE volunteers work with individual groups, and field any potential questions that arise.

Meeting #2:

- (3) This meeting will begin with a check-in with small family groups. The rest of the time will be dedicated specifically to how the school and parents can connect.
- (4) In the small ‘family groups’ parents will brainstorm questions that they have about how their child will be served by the twin cities public school system. Then, they will discuss some of their initial educational expectations.

- (5) Another presentation will occur where community elders will talk about what to expect in the twin cities public schools. All programs that are offered will be explained. Also – a brief and simple overview of such programs as NCLB will be introduced.
- (6) In a small group all members will begin to build a comprehensive list of “educational expectations” for their students. Here, the parents will have input into how they best feel their children can be aided in the question. Discuss with parents what their educational expectations are for their children. Questions: What are short term goals parents have? Long term goals? What do they think of TLC/ELL/LEAP? Does this match up with the vision they had of how their children would be aided in the States? What is missing? Do they have any specific guidance for the teachers who will be working with their children?

MONTH TWO: GROUP FORUMS (Converging the groups created during the previous month).

Unlike the community meetings of the first month, the second month will be mainly dedicated to bringing together each of three sub-sets of groups (already established Hmong Americans, people from the schools, and new Hmong immigrants). During the second month of CAHE’s programming there will be two meetings (every other Saturday). Both meetings will take the form of potluck lunches. All in attendance will be asked to provide some sort of traditional food or beverage to share with the group. Participants children will be asked to attend the first, but not the second meeting.

Goals:

The main goals of the potlucks will be to begin to share all of the collected brainstorming and projects that each of the meetings has been dedicated to preparing (see previous meetings agendas). Beyond this, the potlucks will provide for a space where people can begin to meet one another, and form community alliances.

Agenda – Meeting #1:

- (1) After all of the food has been placed in one room all members of the sub-groups will be asked to divide into their set ‘family group.’ Once these are formed, CAHE volunteers will move through the room and create new larger ‘family groups’ that include a ‘family group’ from each of the different sections (so the new group will include a pre-existing established Hmong-American group, teacher group, and new Immigrant group). These new groups will take on the name that was decided by the established Hmong-American group during their second meeting. Each of these larger groups will be joined by official CAHE Hmong and English translators. No group should be larger than 25 people.
- (2) Once the groups are formed, they will be asked to get their food, and then come back and sit in their new group. During lunch everyone will identify themselves, and tell where they are from.
- (3) After dinner the new Hmong immigrants will be presented with their “CAHE Cares” Welcome baskets. The contents of each basket will be explained.
- (4) Next, all groups will reconvene into the larger group. Following this, CAHE will present a brief 5-10 minute video collection of all of the meetings that have taken place so far.

- (5) The Hmong-American groups who have created representations of dealing with the changes faced in America will be given a chance to present their projects to the entire group.

Agenda for Meeting #2:

- (1) Groups will first gather in their ‘family groups’ to eat and check-in with one another.
- (2) The rest of this meeting will be dedicated to creating dialogue about schools, the classroom, and educational expectations. First, new Hmong immigrants will be asked to share their educational expectations for their children. Next, teachers and administrators will share their information. Last, the established Hmong members will be asked to share their experiences in retrospect. The primary goal is to begin to allow a space for all viewpoints to intersect, and reflect off of one another. Groups will exchange information packets that have been prepared by the translators. Ultimately, at the end of this meeting all members will walk away with at least an initial sense of what will happen in the classroom over the coming months.
- (3) Before the end of the meeting, CAHE will encourage all group members who are interested in continuing with the work they have started in the previous two months to sign an official CAHE Contract of Commitment. A presentation of various tasks forces (as outlined in the long term goals section of the next section) will be presented as options for continuing with their communities of learning. Also, phone trees will be passed out to encourage a continued dialogue.

Phase Two: Long Term Projects

CAHE, in order to be a long term organization, has a series of long term goals that will begin to be set in motion once the initial phase of preparation has occurred. The following is an outline of potential continuing projects and possible future programming:

-Continued monthly meetings that provide for future organized meeting spaces for the created 'family groups.' It is essential that the dialogue begun in the first two months of meetings does not end.

-In order to encourage the preservation of a socio-linguistic oral based history, CAHE will provide the resources necessary for interested community members to create video autobiographies (Lee 8). Hmong adults and children will work together to create the videos. Those in the videos will speak in both Hmong and English. At all times there will be subtitles in both Hmong and English running along the bottom of the screen. At the end of the video project there will be a film festival at local sites (such as colleges, universities, and public schools). A culminating debut party will re-unite all of the people who worked together during CAHE's first months of preparation.

-CAHE will connect with gardening organizations such as the twin cities "Farm in the City" and "Youth Farm and Market Project." With adequate funding, community gardens will be formed in empty lots near TLC and LEAP schools. These gardens will be maintained by students, their parents, and others members of the school. The overall objective of this goal is to allow for a re-connection to the Earth in a culture that otherwise disconnects people from the Earth. Also, in creating a non-educational setting for connections, the garden will provide a space with easily identified common goals and

results. Furthermore, the garden space can be used to grow traditional Hmong and native Minnesotan vegetables and plants. These vegetables can then be used in the schools, and can be taken home by families who have worked in the garden.

-A volunteer training program will be established to help guide those members of the Hmong community who want to volunteer in the St. Paul public schools. Working with the St. Paul public school teachers, CAHE will help those who want to actively participate find proper placement, and will give them basic instructions to help ease any anxiety they may be feeling about entering the school grounds. Similarly, a series of job training sessions for those who are interested in becoming teachers or translators in TLC programs will be offered.

-A continued effort will be made to create a permanent library at CAHE headquarters to serve as a resource center for teachers and administrators in schools with Hmong students. The library will include a comprehensive collection of all past publications concerned with Hmong education. Also, the library will house all of CAHE's efforts to record their formation process. The library will also have a teacher lounge, so that the teachers have a space where they can sit, research, and discuss with one another.

Conclusions:

Ultimately, the biggest long term goal CAHE has is to continue to provide all Hmong immigrants with the support needed to aid in their transition into American society. Working together with parents and schools the differences between Hmong and American cultures that have often been perceived as setbacks can be altered to become points of promise. With each new wave of Hmong immigrants CAHE will be ready to begin the process of education and community building again. There is no specific start or

stopping point to CAHE's potential to enact positive social change. The potential and promise of the program rests in the unlimited storehouse of human hope and energy. As long as there are people who are willing to work towards collaborative community goals, CAHE will continue to exist, grow, and transcend the ordinary.

(alternative representation – a publicity flier for a community meeting under subset III)

CALLING ALL TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

Community Alliances for Hmong Education
(CAHE) – Needs YOU!

Date: JANUARY 15 2004
Time: 2:00 PM
Location: Hayden Park Elementary School
1644 N. Dayton Ave
St. Paul MN

- Come to participate in a new and exciting program dedicated to dialogue, preparation, and community.
- Discuss with fellow educators the ways in which Hmong education has been a part of your life.
- Work with new Hmong immigrants to envision collective educational goals.
- Let us help you!

FOR THOSE WHO LOVE SOCIAL CHANGE IN ACTION

(for more information, contact Rebecca Scott-Rudnick @ rscottrudnic@CAHE.org or
call: 651-671-0343)

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Swaminathan, Raji and Mary V. Alfred. "Strangers in the Mirror: Immigrant Students in the Higher Education Classroom." Adult Learning 12/13.4/1 (Fall 2001/Winter 2002), 6-9.

Thao, Paoze. Mong Education at the Crossroads. University Press of America: Lanham MD, 1999.

Annotated Resources:

Bliatout, Bruce, B. Downing, J. Lewis, S. Yang. Handbook for Teaching Hmong-Speaking Students. Folsom Cordova Unified School District, Southeast Asia Community Resource Center, 1988.

This handbook was published in coordination with the “Transition Program for Refugee Children.” The book itself contains a detailed history and a specific set of learning guidelines meant to increase the awareness of a teacher with Hmong speaking children in their classroom. The format of the book is historical text with boxed areas titled “Implications for Educators.” This was the original source material that I found that inspired my interest in this topic. Usually I do not find handbooks of this sort to be extremely useful, but this handbook is both well organized and easy to use. I would suggest that it be used in any classroom with Hmong students.

Collignon, Francine F., Manka Man, and Serei Tan. “Finding Ways In: Community-Based Perspectives on Southeast Asian Family Involvement with Schools in a New England State.” Journal for the Education for Students Placed at Risk. 6.1&2 (2001), 27-44.

After I decided to change my reform initiative format to a non-profit community organization I found this article is ASP. It fit perfectly with my vision of what I wanted to do in my reform initiative, and gave me a scholarly source with a detailed research project to justify the importance of CBO’s as bridging tools between the immigrant community and the school system. I used the article as a positive example on which I based the envisioning of CAHE’s goals, and philosophy.

Hmong American Partnership. 2003. Hmong American Partnership. 3 December 2004. <www.hmong.org>.

For the last fourteen years HAP has been serving the Hmong American community. As I researched the organization it was repeatedly referred to as one of the most developed community organizations for specific Hmong populations. As I pursued through the groups website I was struck by just how developed their organization is. Their goals and programs are huge and diverse. One of the specific challenges that I felt I was dealing with during my design was to make sure that I was not just creating an HAP offspring organization, and that my project was more than just an underdeveloped mirror image of HAP. With this in mind, I think that I was pushed to be more creative and develop specific and unique goals and projects.

Image: “New Wave of Hmong Head to US.” Census Bureau 2000. AP.

When I found this image of a color coded map that marked the locations of large groups of Hmong immigrants I decided to include it in my issue assessment. As a visual representation it was a powerful way to show just how large this issue actually is, and that Minnesota in particular is in need of specific programming to assist with what was identified in the maps caption. I coupled the image with an indented and quick

overarching statement, mimicking the oracle format used in the book Re-envisioning Education and Democracy. I used the picture as a mock question/problem, and the following statement as a prophetic voice that answered the question, and posed new possibilities.

Nick Schnieder. Interviewed by Rebecca Scott-Rudnick. Interviewed at Macalester MULCH Harvest Festival Dance. November 7, 2004.

Nick Schnieder is one of the program coordinators for a twin cities non-profit organization called "Farm in the City." According to their website, they have the following organizational philosophy: "Everything we do at Farm in the City is designed to teach positive environmental principles, healthy lifestyles, creativity, teamwork, and respect for diversity in our community and in the natural world" (<http://www.farminthecity.org>). The annual MULCH Harvest Festival and Contra Dance is co-sponsored by Farm in the City. At the dance I had the chance to conduct an informal interview with Nick Schieder about the specific group that he works with in the program. Mainly he works with Deaf Hmong Farmers. The workers are able to earn a small, but still important, amount of money growing and selling vegetables together at Farm in the City. According to Nick, the program has not been able to successfully incorporate a younger generation, but he hopes that in the future there will be more bridge building between his specific program and the rest of the Farm in the City. I suppose I was most inspired by the extreme specificity of this program. It showed me that you can choose one particular issue or target group and work towards a specific goal and make positive social change, even if it is just at a miniscule level.

Greater Twin Cities United Way. 2004. United Way. 24 November 2004.
<<http://www.unitedwaytwincities.org/index.cfm>>.

This is a website that highlights the ways in which non-profits have a role in creating programs that aid immigrant populations. From the main page one can maneuver through and find specific outlines of the programs designed to aid immigrant population. The site sections that I used the most came under the tab "Immigrant Snapshots" which allowed me to focus in on the Hmong. As a fairly large umbrella organization I was struck by just how many different target groups the organization has. It was interesting to imagine what United Way looked like in its original phases. Looking through the sites various components I was able to gain understanding of how to best organize my community organizations design (i.e. mission statement, goals, programs).

Kaufman, Marc. "American Odyssey," *Smithsonian*, (September 2004), 85-91.

This article follows the story of several Hmong American community members in the United States. It goes back and forth between fairly positive representations of successful entrances into American culture, and more negative adjustments (families met with violence, stories of gang affiliations). The article has a quick background of the Hmong, and then switches between anecdotal sections about people's lives. Ultimately, the final message of the article is to discuss the ways in which Hmong families have had to change and adapt in the States, but have also been able to successfully maintains a

relationship with their historical background. My mother actually stumbled across this article while she was reading the Smithsonian one day. As are most things in the magazine, this article was beautifully laid out, with stunning and touching photographs, and clear concise writing. I think this article demonstrates the ways in which the story of the Hmong has become a fairly written about and well known. Making the history of the Hmong accessible, be it in magazines, the news, or the internet is one of the first steps to increasing awareness and decreasing ignorance that could lead to racism.

Kurth-Schai, Ruthanne and Chuck Green. Re-envisioning Education and Democracy. *Forthcoming*.

While writing my reform composition I was reading chosen excerpts from this collaborative book between two Macalester College professors. The multi-dimensional book explores the various “stages” and efforts within a reform process. The writing style, and the message within the book were both inspirational as I envisioned my own reform process. With each chapter a new element to the creation of a reform topic was introduced, and undoubtedly effected me while I was preparing for and creating my own reform effort.

“School Garden Sprouts Success.” NEA Pro-Principal 16.1 (October 2003), 1,7.

This brief article in NEA sparked one of the long-term goals of my CAHE. As I was looking for source material I started to come across lots of small little snippets that I really wanted to be able to incorporate into my reform project, but wasn’t sure where to place them. When I saw this article, I was reminded once again of the potential for community building in school and community gardens. Reading the article also triggered a memory of my inner city grade school in Chicago, where during my third grade year, my class created a small garden. My mind was flooded by memories of how empowering it felt to actually grow vegetables near my school. I was able to recall specific workdays and building sessions on Saturdays with parents and teachers. It is this type of memory that my proposal aims at creating for Hmong youth.

Thao, Paoze. Mong Education at the Crossroads. University Press of America: Lanham MD, 1999.

This book attempts to tell the story of the Mong people with an integral focus on using Mong people as the first source for all material. The book was formatted to serve as a text book for courses about Southeastern Asian people. The point of entrance into the immigrant experience is through the education system – and the book follows the order of history, linguistic analysis, and ends with what are called “open letters” to a number of different groups (Hmong, schools, and the federal government) that contain specific recommendations for how to cope with the Mong populations. I was particularly inspired by the books clear message about how most Hmong related curriculums have been designed without any actual input from Hmong community members. The author repeatedly stresses the need to recognize this lack of collective voice in his book – and it was this message that I tried to incorporate into the CAHE philosophy.

Dissemination Plan:

The first step in disseminating my project would be to bring the proposal to a board of advisors. Asked to attend this meeting, and participate in a project review, would be: Identified Hmong-American community members who have shown leadership qualities; an administrator from the St. Paul public schools (if possible, the principal or vice principal at a school with a TLC program); Hmong parents of children in TLC, ELL, or LEAP programs; a local elected politician; teachers in TLC, ELL, and LEAP classrooms; a representative from a local school board; a mentor from HAP or United Way; and a high school student from LEAP. All input and possible alterations would be incorporated into the projects initial design. The first step towards actualizing my reform would be to begin to gather a diverse group of people to serve as the organizations board of advisors and directors. All attendees of this meeting would be asked if they wanted to sit on this board, or if they could otherwise recommend someone else who would be willing to dedicate the time and energy to the project's actualization.