



2008

[Special Issue on Hmong Newcomers to Saint Paul Public Schools] Introduction

Bic Ngo

University of Minnesota, bcngo@umn.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/jsaaea>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ngo, Bic (2008) "[Special Issue on Hmong Newcomers to Saint Paul Public Schools] Introduction," *Journal of Southeast Asian American Education and Advancement*. Vol. 3 : Iss. 1 , Article 1.

DOI: 10.7771/2153-8999.1097

Available at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/jsaaea/vol3/iss1/1>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).



Volume 3 (2008)

Journal of Southeast Asian American Education & Advancement

www.JSAAEA.org

A peer-reviewed
scholarly journal
published by the
National Association
for the Education &
Advancement of
Cambodian, Laotian,
and Vietnamese
Americans (NAFEA)

Introduction

Special Issue on Hmong Newcomers to Saint Paul Public Schools

Guest Editor

Bic Ngo

University of Minnesota

In the late 1970s the aftermath of the Vietnam War brought displaced Hmong refugees (along with other Southeast Asian groups) to the United States (Chan, 1994; Long, 1993). Other waves of Hmong resettlement to the United States occurred in the mid-80s and mid-90s. This has resulted in a Hmong population of 183,265, the majority of whom reside in California, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan and Colorado (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). In 2004, the Thai government closed Wat Tham Krabok (WTK), the last of its Hmong refugee camps (Grigoleit, 2006). This resulted in the most recent resettlement of approximately 15,000 Hmong refugees to the United States (Grigoleit, 2006; Hang et al., 2004). An estimated 5,000 of these WTK refugees came to St. Paul, Minnesota (Hang et al., 2004).

To a large extent, St. Paul was well-prepared to receive the Hmong refugees, since the St. Paul-Minneapolis metropolitan area was already home to the largest urban concentration of Hmong in the world (Minneapolis Foundation, 1999). A resettlement assessment task force put together by then St. Paul mayor Randy Kelly also provided city, county, and community members with information about the educational, social service, and physical and mental health needs of the new refugees (Hang et al., 2004). The assessment report provided information about Hmong families that were of special interest to educators. Among other things, it revealed that children 14 years old or younger comprised more than half (52%) of the population; and less than half of these children had experience with formal schools (Hang et al., 2004). Similar to the WTK Hmong children, Hmong adults also had exceptionally limited experience with education (Hang et al., 2004).

To prepare for the arrival of approximately 1,000 school-age children to the Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS), district personnel assessed the capacity of its English Language Learner (ELL) programs to meet the language and educational needs of WTK families. The district determined that it needed to invest in a language program specifically for the newcomer Hmong population. Transitional Language Centers (TLCs) were thus established to provide short-term, intensive language programs offering bilingual instruction in Hmong and English. From the beginning, the TLCs were designed to be temporary programs that would rapidly transition K-6 Hmong students to mainstream schools and programs.

During the 2004-2005 academic year TLCs were established in four elementary schools as well as one TLC for older youth in an academy for middle and high school students. TLC



SOME RIGHTS RESERVED Readers are free to copy, display, and distribute this article, as long as the work is attributed to the author(s) and the **Journal of Southeast Asian American Education & Advancement**, it is distributed for non-commercial purposes only, and no alteration or transformation is made in the work. More details of this Creative Commons license are available at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>. All other uses must be approved by the author(s) or **JSAAEA**.

teachers and staff were provided “additional training in ELL strategies, Hmong culture, and refugee issues” by the school district (Saint Paul Public Schools, 2004). All newcomer Hmong students took an initial language assessment test at the district’s Student Placement Center. The families were then able to choose between enrolling their children in a regular school program or a TLC program. Despite encouragement by the district to enroll their children in a TLC, refugee Hmong parents did not always choose the TLC. Instead, some chose more traditional ELL programs or Language Academy (LA) schools.

To determine the effectiveness of the TLC programs, Saint Paul Public Schools asked the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI) at the University of Minnesota to conduct an evaluation study (see Bigelow et al., 2005). The multi-part study specifically examined the effectiveness of the newly created TLC programs with the established Language Academy programs. The primary questions for the larger study include: a) What are the perceptions of educators and parents of the capacity of the TLC and LA programs to meet the needs of elementary Hmong newcomers?; b) What, if any, are the differences between the programs in terms of students’ language learning achievement?; and c) If there are differences, are the differences sufficient to warrant the extra costs associated with TLCs?

This special issue draws from this larger research study to examine the experiences and perspectives of three groups who were involved in and affected by the TLCs. The three articles in this issue on the transition of Wat Tham Krabok Hmong refugees to Saint Paul Public Schools reflect the experiences of “stakeholder” groups that include principals, teachers, and Hmong parents. Bigelow, Basford, and Smidt’s article illustrate the perspectives of teachers and educational assistants on how well the TLCs and Language Academies supported the needs of the refugee children. Wahlstrom’s article offers insights from the school principals at elementary schools that received WTK children. Ngo’s article explores the experiences of WTK parents with their children’s education, arguing for a need for more research on the affective consequences of cultural capital.

These articles provide insight into the experiences of the most recent generation of Hmong immigrants to the United States. They contribute to the growing research on Hmong American education (see, e.g., Ngo & Lee, 2007), and attest to the need for practices, policies, and research that attend to the specific needs of different immigrant groups.

References

- Bigelow, M., Ngo, B., Wahlstrom, K. L., Ingram, D., & Whitehouse, B. (2005). *A preliminary report on an evaluation of the transitional language center program in the Saint Paul Public Schools*. Minneapolis: Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, College of Education and Human Development, University of Minnesota.
- Chan, S. (Ed.). (1994). *Hmong means free: Life in Laos and America*. Philadelphia: Temple University.
- Grigoleit, G. (2006). Coming home: The integration of Hmong refugees from Wat Tham Krabok, Thailand into American society. *Hmong Studies Journal*, 7, 1-22.
- Hang, M., Anderson, J., Walker, P., Thao, M., Chang, M., & Hestness, L. (2004). *American Paj Ntaub: Wat Tham Krabok team assessment report executive summary*. St. Paul, MN: City of St. Paul.
- Long, L. D. (1993). *Ban Vinai: The refugee camp*. New York: Columbia University.

- Ngo, B., & Lee, S. (2007). Complicating the image of model minority success: A review of Southeast Asian American education. *Review of Educational Research*, 77(4), 415-453.
- Saint Paul Public Schools. (2004). St. Paul Public Schools to open two new transitional language centers. St. Paul, MN: Author. Retrieved October 16, 2008 from <http://www.stpaul.k12.mn.us/15Nov2004.html>
- The Minneapolis Foundation (1999, Fall). *Minnesota, nice or not?* Minneapolis, MN: Author
- U.S. Census Bureau (2005). American Community Survey. Retrieved October 16, 2008 from http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DatasetMainPageServlet?_program=ACS&_submenuId=&_lang=en&_ts=



Volume 3 (2008)

Journal of Southeast Asian American Education & Advancement

www.JSAAEA.org

A peer-reviewed
scholarly journal
published by the
National Association
for the Education &
Advancement of
Cambodian, Laotian,
and Vietnamese
Americans (NAFEA)

Editor

Dr. Wayne E. Wright
University of Texas, San Antonio

Associate Editors

Dr. Chhany Sak-Humphry
University of Hawaii

Dr. KimOanh Nguyen-Lam
California State University, Long Beach

Book Review Editor

Vichet Chhuon
University of California—Santa Barbara

Creative Works Editor

Phouang Hamilton
Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

Special Advisor

Anne Frank
University of California, Irvine, Southeast Asian Archives

Editorial Assistant

Mariana Kuhl
University of Texas, San Antonio

Comments and questions for the editorial staff may be directed to jsaaea@lists.sis.utsa.edu

Editorial Review Board

Dr. Carl L. Bankston III

Tulane University

Dr. Phala Chea

Lowell Public Schools

Dr. Changming Duan

University of Missouri, Kansas City

Dr. Nancy H. Hornberger

University of Pennsylvania

Dr. Peter Nien-Chu Kiang

University of Massachusetts, Boston

Dr. Pollie Bith-Melander

Asian and Pacific Islander Wellness Center

Dr. George Chigas

University of Massachusetts, Lowell

Dr. Sopal Ear

U.S. Naval Postgraduate School

Dr. Samlong Inthaly

Minneapolis Public Schools

Dr. Kevin K. Kumashiro

University of Illinois, Chicago

Special Issue on Hmong Newcomers
Ngo: Introduction

Dr. Stacey Lee
University of Wisconsin, Madison

Dr. Sue Needham
California State University, Dominguez Hills

Dr. Max Niedzwiecki
Daylight Consulting Group

Dr. Clara Park
California State University, Northridge

Dr. Loan T. Phan
University of New Hampshire

Dr. Karen Quintiliani
California State University, Long Beach

Dr. Fay Shin
California State University, Long Beach

Dr. Yer J. Thao
Portland State University

Dr. Khatharya Um
University of California, Berkeley

Dr. Terrence G. Wiley
Arizona State University

Dr. David Chanpanha Ley
Montgomery County Public Schools

Dr. Bic Ngo
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Dr. Leakhena Nou
California State University, Long Beach

Dr. Mark Pfeifer
Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi

Dr. Bounlieng Phommasouvanh
Minnesota Department of Education

Dr. Kalyani Rai
University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee

Dr. Nancy J. Smith-Hefner
Boston University

Dr. Myluong Tran
San Diego State University

Dr. Linda Trinh Vo
University of California, Irvine

Dr. Zha Blong Xiong
University of Minnesota

Dr. Kou Yang
California State University, Stanislaus

Doctoral Student Editorial Review Board

Keo Chea
University of Pennsylvania

Loan Dao
University of California, Berkeley

Ha Lam
Arizona State University

Vanna Som
Harvard University

Giang Pham
University of Minnesota

Tinou Tran
University of Houston, Texas

Phitsamay Sychitkokhong Uy
Harvard University

Vichet Chhuon
University of California, Santa Barbara

Annie BichLoan Duong
San Joaquin County Office of Education

Ravy Lao
University of California, Santa Barbara

Rassamichanh Souryasack
University of California, Santa Barbara

Layheng Ting
State University of New York, Albany

Loan Tran
University of California, Santa Barbara

Yang Sao Xiong
University of California, Los Angeles