CAMBODIAN-AMERICAN VIEWS OF FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS AND FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

by

Peter Tan Keo

Dissertation Committee

Professor Hope Jensen Leichter, Sponsor
Professor A. Lin Goodwin

Approved by the Committee on the Degree of Doctor of Education

Date 20 May 2015

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education in
Teachers College, Columbia University

2015

UMI Number: 3704486

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS
The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript
and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed,
a note will indicate the deletion.

UMI 3704486

Published by ProQuest LLC (2015). Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.

Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.
All rights reserved. This work is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code

ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

المنارة للاستشارات

www.manaraa.com

ABSTRACT

CAMBODIAN-AMERICAN VIEWS OF FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS AND FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

Peter Tan Keo

This qualitative dissertation examines the views and perspectives of Cambodian family members in the United States about family-school partnerships and family involvement in education. The dissertation argues that some conventional ideas about family-school partnerships are limited in that they assume that Cambodian families already have ownership in schools or are comfortable interacting with school partners. A basic question is: how can Cambodian families be included as participants in school decisions, given their limited English proficiency and/or lack of awareness of the American school system? The voices of Cambodians have not been sufficiently documented in practice or the literature and research to date.

The study's two main research questions were: 1) What does family-school partnership mean to Cambodian families? and 2) What do Cambodian family members say can be done to optimize learning for children at school? The data were collected through semi-structured interviews with respondents from a Cambodian-American community. Respondents discussed how and to what extent family and school partners can work together to provide learning opportunities for Cambodian-American students. The data were coded and analyzed using qualitative methods.

Two main themes emerged from the findings. The first theme focused on building family-school partnerships through communication to address problems and improve cultural understanding. The second theme focused on how teachers and families can work together to support children's school achievement.

Building on the findings of this study, it is recommended that future research explore developing cultural competency among teachers and Cambodian families. Future research should also explore effective practices for families to support their children at home. In terms of new ideas, future research ought to explore family-school partnerships among Cambodians in the United States from the perspectives of school dropouts and their families. Future research should also seek to further disaggregate data on Cambodians from data on other Asian American and Pacific Islander groups.

© Copyright Peter Tan Keo 2015

All Rights Reserved

DEDICATION

For my parents whose unconditional love, compassion, and courage have shaped my understanding of the world and the need to make it better.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation came to fruition because of the generous contributions of many people. First, I would like to thank my sponsor, Professor Hope Jensen Leichter, for taking a keen interest in this research from the very beginning. We have come a long way since 2007, and you have been extremely helpful over the years. No doubt, my ability to persist during hard times, as a doctoral student and beyond, was in no small part attributed to your patience, kindness, and compassion. Indeed, these are rare human qualities and you fully possess each with vigor and valor. Also, I would like to thank my adviser, Professor A. Lin Goodwin, who agreed to support this study back in 2008. You have consistently and intellectually challenged me in ways that has only made me stronger, as a researcher.

Professors Leichter and Goodwin, you are two of the sharpest and most insightful people I know, and I am forever indebted to your support.

I would also like to thank my incredibly talented, intelligent wife, Seng-Dao Keo. Your persistent ability to question the issues of educational equity, for all students, is a daily reminder of the plight of all young people, especially Southeast Asian students from disadvantaged backgrounds. You love all children equally, and that is truly remarkable. Despite your many successes in life you remain humble, and I thank you for that as well. Thank you, most especially, for your continued love, support, and patience, particularly at a time of great chaos and intellectual upheaval, as I sifted through and made sense of my data. Certainly, you would not be who you are today without the struggles and

support of your own loving family. And, for that, I thank them too. You are, indeed, my soul mate.

I would also like to thank my siblings for teaching and reminding me about the humanity of kindness, humility, and true inner happiness. You remind me each day that life is precious, and we must approach it with great optimism and hope, despite the proverbial cards with which we have been dealt. Thank you for always having my back and loving me unconditionally.

I thank my ancestors whose presence is ubiquitous. Though the genocide has separated us during this lifetime – maternal and paternal grandfathers and grandmothers, aunts, and uncles – I know you are always there, guiding me onto a course of compassion. You give me the strength and courage to bring dignity to every man, woman, and child irrespective of their background. I have grown to cherish and love mankind because of your suffering. I stand on your shoulders of greatness.

Lastly, I thank my incredible parents. My late father, Bunthoeun Keo, a political activist for peace, academic and thinker, has taught me that nothing has greater value than education. You have convinced me, at a young age, that intolerance is born from ignorance, and education is the elixir to such moral evil. And no matter what happens in life, education lives on forever. It is indelibly etched into our mind and heart. You have taught me that the worst form of human tragedies, hatred or otherwise, can never strip away my ability to think critically and to act compassionately. You have also taught me to fight injustice with intelligence, with the written word, and to have compassion for those suffering throughout the world.

To my loving and beautiful mother, Thara Tan Keo, you have taught me to live every ounce of life with courage, conviction, and compassion. You are, indeed, a warrior's daughter. You continue to fight human cruelty and suffering with love and dignity. Mom, tears come to my eyes remembering how unfair life has been to you. Through hell and back, through the genocide and back, through the pain of losing every member of your family and back, I am perpetually at awe at your strength and ability to have infinite compassion for, and faith in, mankind, despite your own pain and suffering. You are the strongest person I know, and I am blessed to have been born to you.

Mom and Dad, your struggles have been my struggles. Your struggles have also been my strength. This dissertation is but a small token of my appreciation for the courage and compassion that you have shared with me. You are, forever, my heroes.

There are countless others who played an integral role in helping me complete this dissertation. For that, I am grateful to each of you.

PTK

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Chapter I – INTRODUCTION…………………………………………………	1
Background…………………………………………………………….……	3
Statement of the Problem………………………………………………….……	9
Purpose of the Study…………………………………………………………	10
Research Questions……………………………………………………..……	11
Positionality: The Cambodian-American Researcher…………………..……	12
Chapter II – LITERATURE REVIEW………………………………………	16
Moving beyond Generalities of Families……………………………………	17
Cremin's Families as Educators……………………………..……	17
Leichter's Family Stories and Memories…………………………..……	20
Epstein's Family-School Partnerships…………………………..……	22
Family-School Partnerships and Problems…………………………..……	25
Family Involvement in Education……………………………………………	26
Family Income and Involvement……………………………………..	29
Ethnic Minority Family-School Partnerships…………………………..……	32
Southeast Asian Educational Experiences………………………………..	38
Ethnic Cambodian Americans……………………………………………….	47
Strengths and Weaknesses of Previous Studies………………………………..	50
Chapter III – METHODOLOGY……………………………………………	54
Methods………………………………………………………………………..	57
Interview Questions……………………………………………………….……	58
Research Setting………………………………………………………..……	60
Data Collection………………………………………………………………	62
Sampling Procedures…………………………………………………...……	64
Analysis…………………………………………………………………...……	65
The Interview Process………………………………………………….……	65
Challenges in Finding People to Participate…………………………………	67
Coding……………………………………………………………………….……	71
Round One Coding…………………………………… ………….	71
Round Two Coding………………………………………………….	72
Differences between Themes and Patterns…………………………..	73
External Validity…………………………………………………………….	74
Trustworthiness of Data and Findings………………………………………	74
Chapter IV – RESULTS…………………………………………………… ….	76
Description of Interviewees………………………………………………….	76
Steve……………………………………………………………………….	79
David………………………………………………………………………	80

Paula………………………………………………………………………. 82
Larry……………………………………………………………………… 84
Sarah……………………………………………………………………… 86
Amy………………………………………………………………………. 87
Charles…………………………………………………………............. 89
What Does Family-School Partnership Mean to Cambodian Families?............ 91
Building Family-School Partnerships through Communication………. 91
Pattern a: contacting parents about problems…………………… 99
Pattern b: learning culture between families and teachers...…… 102
What Do Cambodian Family Members Say Can Be Done In Order to
Optimize Learning for Children at School?... 106
Supporting Children with Schoolwork at Home and School ………… 106

Chapter V – DISCUSSION…………………………………………………… 114
Communicating between Families and Schools………………………………. 115
Information to Support Newcomer Families and Schools……………. 119
Addressing Problems to Support Children……………………………………. 121
Overcoming Cultural Barriers………………………………………………… 124
Taking Steps at Home to Support Family-School Partnerships………………. 128
Limitations of the Study………………………………………………………. 130
Methods……………………………………………………......... 130
Small Sample……………………………………………………….. 132
Coding……………………………………………………………….. 132
Constant Comparison……………………………………………….. 133
Short Timeframe…………………………………………………….. 134
One Geographic Space………………………………………………. 135
Adults Only, Not Children………………………………………….. 135
Church Setting………………………………………………………. 136
Ethnic Cambodian Researcher……………………………………....... 136
Future Research……………………………………………………………….. 139
Develop Cultural Competency among Teachers and Families…............ 139
Explore Effective Practices to Support Families at Home…………….. 140
Explore Family-School Partnerships from the
Perspectives of Dropouts……………………………………………….. 140
Further Disaggregate Data for Cambodians……………………............ 142
Practical Applications of Findings……………………………………………… 143
Epilogue….…………………………………………………………………….. 144
Observations of Family Events……………………………………….. 145
Design Ethnographic Interview Schedule………………………………. 146
Focus Groups……………………………………………………………. 146
A Message to Future Researchers……………………………………….. 150

REFERENCES…………………………………………………………………. 152

APPENDICES
Appendix A – Interview guide for Cambodian families………………………… 158

Appendix B – Codes……………………………………………………………........ 160
Appendix C – Short background survey for respondents………………………. 164
Appendix D – Informed consent form………………………………………….. 165
Appendix E – Transcripts……………………………………………………….. 170
Appendix F – Timeframe of data collection and analysis………………………. 214

LIST OF TABLES

Table Page

1 Table One: Kinds of Descriptive Questions……………………… 58

2 Table Two: Description of Interviewees………………………….. 78

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure Page

1 Figure One: NCAS Strategy for Asian
Family-School-Community Partnership ………………………….. 35

2 Figure Two: Site Development Objectives……………………….. 36

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Teacher has to provide information to the parent…let them know what's going on with your kid, either call or phone or [send] a letter and find out. That's a big thing that the teacher has to do with the parent…for our Cambodian people…most of them don't understand English. When the teacher call [parents] don't know what they're talking about. When the letter comes they don't know what it is, they just throw away, or something like that. And that's the main thing for our people here. Because most of them, they non-educated and they don't know what's going on and how they can help the children – Steve

[Cambodian parents] should be more involved in the school…at lunch time, I went to help sell ice cream. I volunteered for one hour during my lunch time. I take my sandwich and I served the students ice cream in the cafeteria. I did everything I could with the time I didn't have [as a single mother]. And I want Cambodian parents to do that – Paula

One of the family that had a problem the student coming home and the parent asked them to do the homework and the student don't want to do the homework and the parent said, "I'm going to spank you if you don't do that." And the student said, "If you spank me I'm going to call the police," and then the student said, "Okay, go ahead and spank me!" And the parent spank them and [the child] call the police…Between teachers [and parents], it looks like a "cross-culture" because as a Cambodian family, we strictly discipline them. But in this country, if we discipline them sometimes it's against the law… But as Asians, we try to discipline them because we want them to go to the right path. But sometimes we do in the good heart but it turn out against the law…And I think that [Americans] should understand our culture – David

Cambodian-American Views of Family-School Partnerships and Family Involvement in Education is a qualitative dissertation regarding the views and perspectives of adults who are or were guardians of Cambodian-American students educated in the American school system. Individuals for this study shared their unique

views regarding family-school partnerships and family involvement in education. Respondents described how they believe or perceive Cambodian families get involved (or should get involved) in their children's education. Respondents discussed how, and to what extent, family and school partners can work together in order to provide rich learning opportunities for Cambodian-American students.

This dissertation argues that conventional family-school partnerships are limited in scope, given the broad assumption that Cambodian families already have ownership in schools, or they are comfortable interacting with school partners. How, for example, can Cambodian families be included as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy activities through PTAs/PTOs or school councils (e.g., Epstein & Jansorn, 2004, see also Epstein, 2001b), given their limited English proficiency and/or lack of awareness of the American school system? Conventional definitions make broad assumptions, in part because Cambodian voices often are not documented in practice or extant literature and research. From a practical standpoint, there is a need to document their voices to better understand the challenges Cambodians continue to face in the community. Those challenges may impact their children's experiences at school. Where Cambodian parents may feel disengaged and/or disconnected from working with teachers, there also is a need to explore the causal factors. Plainly, what causes families to feel disempowered?

As such, these family-school partnerships may give Cambodian families a chance to speak up about what concerns them – opportunities often not granted to Cambodian families at school. It gives them a voice at the table, while affording adults the opportunity to address academic and/or behavioral issues that may arise regarding their

children (Aung & Yu, 2007; Thao, 2003, see also NCAS, 2000; SEARAC, 2011). Schools often report fewer disciplinary actions when effective family-school partnerships are created between families and school partners (Epstein & Voorhis, 2010). Furthermore, given the vast ethnic, cultural, and linguistic differences across the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community, it may be useful to strengthen family-school partnerships that speak directly to the needs of Cambodian families, in addition to other Southeast Asian groups, in part given there are 48 ethnic groups speaking over 300 different languages in the AAPI community (see CARE, 2010, 2011). Given the high dropout rates among Cambodians (SEARAC, 2013), the wider audience may be interested in helping Cambodian families in particular, given the negative implications of dropouts on the US economy (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011). High school dropouts are more likely to end up in jail or juvenile detention (Dillon, 2009).

Background

There were many reasons for selecting this topic as important to research. As a Cambodian American myself, over the years, I have heard an increasing number of Cambodian parents discussing their concerns regarding young Cambodian Americans dropping out of school, having children as an adolescent out of wedlock, and joining negative peer groups including gangs. However, while my personal experiences sparked an initial interest in deciding to research this topic, there were other factors that compelled me to pursue this study more intimately. From an economic perspective, for example, there is the concern that Cambodian Americans are dropping out of high school and college at an alarming rate. According to the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center

(SEARAC), 38.5% of Cambodian adults over the age of 25 do not have a high school diploma or equivalent, while 65.8% of Cambodian Americans have not attended college (SEARAC, 2013).

High school graduates tend to earn more money than high school dropouts (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011). According to the Alliance for Excellent Education's November 2011 issue brief titled, *The High Cost of High School Dropouts: What the Nation Pays for Inadequate High Schools*, if all high school students who dropped out of the class of 2011 graduated, the US economy would have benefitted from nearly $154 billion in additional income over the course of their lifetimes. Still, earning potential is much higher for individuals who hold a bachelor's degree, as compared to someone with only a high school diploma or its equivalent (US Census Bureau, 2012). The US Census Bureau reported, "Among all workers, those with a bachelor's degree on average earned about $20,000 more per year than workers with a high school diploma or a General Educational Development (GED) certificate" (2012, 2).

Cambodian Americans are also struggling to complete college. For example, the 2011 National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research on Education (CARE) report titled, *The Relevance of Asian Americans & Pacific Islanders in the College Completion Agenda*, indicated that for adults (aged 25 and older) only 28.8% of Cambodians who entered college attained a degree, while 42.9% of Cambodians who entered college did not complete school to earn a degree. Statistics are equally staggering for other Southeast Asian groups who enter but never complete college: 47.5% Hmong; 46.5% Laotian; and 33.7% Vietnamese. CARE suggested, "These data represent the significant challenges that exist among marginalized and

vulnerable groups of AAPI students, and demonstrate why AAPIs are relevant to the college completion agenda" (2011, 10). They further suggested that institutions serving AAPI students must recognize and thus better understand the unique needs and challenges that exist within the AAPI community. These factors often lead to high rates of attrition and low high school and college completion rates among various Southeast Asian ethnic groups, which include Cambodian-American students.

But to better understand Cambodian Americans, one must first understand the vast differences across the AAPI community in terms of language and culture. Mentioned above, cultural and linguistic differences challenge the learning and living experiences of a number of Asian American families. For example, there is a discrepancy of educational attainment by Asian ethnic groups of people aged 25 and over in the US. According to Niedzwiecki and Doung (2004), 60.9% of Asian Indians hold a bachelor's degree or higher, followed by ethnic Chinese (46.6%), Koreans (43.1%), Filipinos (41.7%), and Japanese (40.4%). However, data for members of Southeast Asian groups are staggering: Cambodian (9.1%); Laotian (7.6%); and Hmong (7.4%). Per capita incomes for Southeast Asian groups are equally alarming: Cambodian ($10,215); Laotian ($11,454); and Hmong ($6,613). These figures, compared to the national benchmark for poverty of $21,587, indicate that a large proportion of Cambodian, Laotian, and Hmong families live at or under the federal poverty line. Research indicates that there is a negative correlation between family income level and academic achievement, whereby "one important mitigating factor on student outcomes is the family's income level" (Uy, 2007, 44). Uy (2007) argued that certain "challenges that the Southeast Asian community face have not changed over the course of thirty or

even the past five years [with] issues of poverty, low educational attainment, linguistic isolation, and parents' lack of familiarity with the US school system" (p. 46).

Today, the schooling and socialization experiences of many Southeast Asian children are complicated by a variety of factors, often found at home, school, and in the community. For example, schools often lack the capacity to deal with vast, divergent cultural differences across the Southeast Asian community (Pho, 2007; Thao, 2003), which include linguistic and cultural barriers in Cambodian families (Aung & Yu, 2007). Those challenges often complicate the experiences of young Southeast Asian students, particularly of lower income families speaking limited English (see, for example, Uy, 2007). These challenges are highlighted in a case study titled, *Capacity Building for Southeast Asian Family-School Partnerships*, conducted by the Harvard Family Research Project and commissioned by the National Coalition of Advocates for Students.[1]

> Schools are generally unfamiliar with the groups that comprise the Southeast Asian population and their immigration experiences. This lack of knowledge poses a barrier to their support of students and their families. Although many Asian students are academically successful, a great deal of diversity exists within this population. Students coming from low-income and refugee backgrounds often do not fit the 'model minority' stereotype. Their families have limited education and knowledge of the American school system. Families' potential for involvement is often challenged by cultural and linguistic differences as well as the lack of basic information and skills about how to participate effectively in their children's schooling (National Coalition of Advocates for Students, 2000, 1).

---

[1] The National Coalition of Advocates for Students began in 1975 as a network of education advocates to address the issues of student suspension and expulsion. Today, the 22 member organization works to improve access to quality public education among disadvantaged students. The organization seeks to strengthen parent roles in school governance so that parents can advocate for changes in school policy and practice. From kindergarten through grade 12, NCAS organizes students and families, focusing especially on communities of color, recent immigrants, migrant farm workers, and people with disabilities. For more information, visit http://www.hfrp.org/var/hfrp/storage/fckeditor/File/ncas.pdf.

Cambodian families, for example, are shaped by their unique history, resettlement patterns, war, violence, victory, and cultural traditions and norms. In terms of resettlement patterns, a vast majority of Cambodian families settled into the United States in the late 1970s and early 1980s, mainly as a result of the Cambodian civil war, genocide, and the Cold War throughout Southeast Asia (or, Indochina). Charles Bankston, a renowned sociologist on immigration in America, offers a vivid depiction of Cambodian life years after their arrival in the US.[1] He noted poignantly:

> Adjusting to American society has been difficult for most Cambodians, who come from rural areas [in Cambodia] and have few relevant job skills and little familiarity with mainstream American culture. One of the difficulties has been the problem of differences between generations, between older people who see themselves as Cambodians and sometimes speak little, if any English, and younger people who have either been born in the United States or have no memory of Cambodia and consider themselves entirely American…many Cambodian young people are plagued by identity problems… and they must often deal with racism from classmates and with being teased about their 'foreignness.'

Bankston also addresses the impact of cultural misunderstanding on the lives of Cambodian families and children. The following was postulated:

> Since their arrival in the United States…some unfortunate stereotypes of Cambodians have developed. Because Cambodian culture places a high value on courtesy and avoidance of direct confrontation, other Americans sometimes stereotype them as passive. Among older Cambodian Americans some of this appearance of passivity results from their unfamiliarity with the larger American society or with the English language...Because Cambodian Americans have settled most often in urban areas, they have frequent contact with disadvantaged members of other minority groups. Often these encounters are troubled by cultural misunderstandings and by the social problems frequently found in poor communities.

---

[1] Bankston, C. L. (2009). *Cambodian Americans*. Retrieved May 18, 2009, from http://www.everyculture.com/multi/Bu-Dr/Cambodian-Americans.html.

One of the most egregious outcomes for these people, especially Cambodian youths, is arguably the growing popularity of ethnic Cambodian gangs (e.g., Aung & Yu, 2007). Many young Cambodians seek refuge in risky surrogate family members, which results from conflicts at home with their parents/guardians and misunderstandings at school with peers and teachers. Aung and Yu (2007) argued that many Cambodian youths often join gangs because "their parents are not engaged in their education and an older sibling is already involved with a gang – offering the 'instant gratification' of needed support and belonging" (p. 102).

Traditional family-school partnerships often require families to participate in activities that are mostly led by English-speaking educators and school staffers (NCAS, 2000). However, a closer examination of ethnic-based research would indicate otherwise, suggesting that many Cambodian family members do not speak English proficiently, and linguistic barriers often prevent them from interacting with school partners altogether. There could be a certain level of discomfort related to language barrier. According to a 2011 SEARAC report, examining language characteristics of Southeast Asians by percentage of population 5 years and older, they found that 78.5% of Cambodians speak a language other than English and 41.1% speak English less than "very well." Only 21.5% of Cambodians speak English only, compared to 80% of Americans overall (SEARAC, 2011). These figures suggest that language barriers continue to exist for many Cambodians living in the US, which could prevent them from getting involved with school partners (Aung & Yu, 2007; for information on how language barriers affect other Southeast Asian groups, see Pho, 2007; Thao, 2003; for information on this issue regarding non-Southeast Asian ethnic groups, see Lopez, 2001).

Also, Southeast Asian families may view involvement in education as providing discipline at home (e.g., Pho, 2007), in addition to sharing with children important values of hard work, being a good person, and respecting people. That type of family involvement may require little interaction with school officials, and one might assume that children can use values to succeed in different settings (e.g., Lopez, 2001). Though Cambodian Americans are essentially "American," these and other immigrants and refugees often bring with them old customs, habits, cultural practices, and traditions to the new country that may be difficult to shed (see, for example, Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Those "old habits" in part inform the way families make sense of how to educate their children in the US.

Lastly, throughout this dissertation, I refer to family-school partnerships as the formal or informal relationships established between families, teachers, principals, counselors, and others in the community, particularly in supporting the schooling experiences of students (e.g., Epstein, 1995, 2001a, 2001b; Epstein & Jansorn, 2004; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). For this study, I use the words parents, guardians, adults, family, and family members interchangeably to refer to the important adult figures of Cambodian-American children. In referring to critical school partners, I use interchangeably the words teachers, school staff, school officials, school members, counselors, and educators.

Statement of the Problem

Despite a growing body of research covering the importance of family-school partnerships (Epstein, 1995, 2001a, 2001b, 2008; Epstein & Salinas, 2004; Henderson &

Mapp, 2002; Henderson, Mapp, Johnson & Davies, 2007; Stevenson & Baker, 1987), it is believed that existing family-school partnerships – in practice and research – can be more effective in supporting Cambodian-American families, especially those with limited English proficiency. Given the vast ethnic, cultural, and linguistic differences across the AAPI community (see CARE, 2010, 2011), it may be useful to strengthen family-school partnerships that speak directly to the needs of Cambodian families. In doing so, this partnership may enable Cambodian families to have a voice at the table, while further enabling families and school partners to address academic and/or behavioral issues that may arise regarding their children. Research on the impact of family-school partnerships indicates positive outcomes on the family and child. Such outcomes may include increased family involvement, increased attendance, reading, writing, and math achievement, in addition to improved report card grades and behavior (Epstein, 1995, 2001a, 2001b; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to collect data directly from parents/guardians who are raising or have raised Cambodian-American children. This research is intended to provide Cambodian families with the space and time to share their views of what family-school partnerships mean to them. This often is an opportunity not available in research or practice. It is further believed that cultural and linguistic barriers may limit Cambodian families from more fully engaging with school partners, which may have direct academic and non-academic consequences on the child. Therefore, this dissertation affords families the opportunity to share their voices, albeit for a small group

of people. To some extent, this study also affords individuals working with Cambodian families the opportunity to better understand the meaning of family-school partnerships and family involvement in education from the Cambodian adult perspective, from which shared personal stories (see Leichter, 1997) can be used to strengthen practices, programs, and policies.

Research Questions

The goal of the study is to investigate and document what family-school partnerships mean to family members raising Cambodian-American children, and how partnerships can be utilized to optimize learning for children at school. Therefore, the following research questions guide the study forward.

1. What does family-school partnership mean to Cambodian families?
2. What do Cambodian family members say can be done in order to optimize learning for children at school?

The first research question attempts to understand what Cambodian families' perceptions are of family-school partnerships. It may be difficult to understand what that partnership is without having direct and explicit conversations with them. Relevant questions asked are:

- How do they define it?
- How have they enacted it with their own children?
- What have been the benefits and issues they have experienced?

The second question documents what family members say can be done in order to optimize learning for their children. Different forms of learning may pertain to achieving

good grades, having healthy relationships with peers and adults, and the transference of values and skills to support learning in different contexts.

Positionality: The Cambodian-American Researcher

My ethnic background may have influenced the interests underlying this study. As an American, raised by Cambodian political refugees, it is difficult to separate my ethnic background from the so-called hyphenated me. No matter how hard I try, over the course of over 30 years, being essentially "Cambodian" is not only part of my genetic makeup, but it defines who I was, who I am, and who I wanted to become: an accepted Cambodian American in mainstream society. While I am expected to act, talk, walk, and behave a certain way at home, often times those standards would almost instantaneously change the second I walked out the door and entered the world of "Americans." At home, my parents often tried their best to embrace two seemingly disparate cultures, allowing us to have a pseudo bicultural and bilingual household. We spoke both Khmer and English – though my two brothers and I spoke more English at home than our parents. My parents had a good command of the English language. Despite best efforts, my parents did reinforce, time and again, the importance of being "Khmer." That often consisted of their children "obeying" the commands of elders, across all major contexts. Thus, we were not given the freedom to express ourselves to adults. This was the case even though it was clear that adults themselves were at times wrong. But, at school, we were expected to act a different way by both adults and peers. The adults, namely teachers, wanted us to share our views with fellow classmates. The freedom to do just that was admittedly very difficult at an early age. We were not allowed to practice this

skill at home, much less speak out in public especially to adults. While the presence of two cultures can be a "weight" and "burden," they may also be a resource, particularly in helping hyphenated Americans like myself navigate different cultural boundaries often with great success.

What my own experiences make me realize is that hyphenated Americans are expected to socialize in different contexts of the American society. We often have little guidance and understanding of the world around us. The differences in culture and language affect how we interact and behave in relation to our American peers and teachers at school, and Cambodian parents/guardians and elders at home. The weight of expectation, from both American and Cambodian cultures, is heavy at home and school. It is no surprise, at least to me, that so many hyphenated Cambodian Americans continue to struggle in society. We are never given a cultural compass to navigate the sometimes turbulent water of home and school life. However, cultural compasses can be developed by learning from other people's cultural experiences, and how they have dealt with similar situations. We also learn how to navigate as we go, from our own trials and tribulations.

Perhaps the biggest and most eminent bias is a deep understanding of the Cambodian political and refugee history. That may have led me to believe respondents were apprehensive, if not outright distrusting, of authority figures and people in positions of power. Those positions include teachers, principals, government officials, and law enforcement agencies. On some level, highly educated researchers might also be included on that list of power and privilege. Going into the research study, I understood

that many Cambodians were private people, and they may not necessarily enjoy sharing personal stories that may reflect poorly on their families with outsiders.

Over the years, in listening to stories and conducting research on Cambodian-American youths, I began asking questions that may have appeared simple to answer on the surface. However, they were actually quite difficult to answer. For example, why were so many young Cambodian Americans dropping out of school, and instead resorting to criminal activity? Why did they seek refuge in gangs? What was it, in particular, about gangs that made these young people feel "safe" and "wanted?" What was happening at home that made them feel disconnected from their families? What could be done at the school level to help these young people? Why did they feel disconnected at school? And, last but certainly not least, what could school partners do to support families in keeping children safe and away from the streets? That last question was one of many that led me to this research. And, at this stage of the dissertation, I recognize that I only have answered a fraction of the endless questions that aim to support young Cambodians and their families.

My personal experiences of the Cambodian people may have sparked an initial interest in this study, but what compelled me to undertake this dissertation was the concern that young Cambodians are dropping out of high school at an alarming rate. Without proper intervention, at the home and school level, Cambodian youths may continue to struggle to find gainful employment; dropouts, in particular, may end up in jail or in juvenile detention. Family-school connections, therefore, may be one effective vehicle to connect students to resources and services.

In moving through the dissertation, it is important to note that Chapter II offers a relatively extensive review of existing literature and research, providing general knowledge and theoretical context within which the current study could fit. Chapter III provides the reader with a methodological review for this particular dissertation research study. Chapter IV shares the primary findings from the study. Chapter V discusses the implications of those findings, and how they relate to existing literature and research. It also addresses limitations and makes recommendations for future research to build on this study.

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews extant literature and research regarding family-school partnerships and family involvement in education. The overarching intention was to first identify theory and research that broadly identifies and highlights the role of families as important educators, beginning with Cremin's work from which Leichter's research on family stories and memories build. Leichter's research broadly supports this dissertation, in that it discusses the use of probes and other mechanisms to help families talk about personal experiences, which they can share with teachers. From a general discussion of families as educators, it moves into a discussion of family-school partnerships and explores general but important findings from Epstein's research. From there, the literature review becomes more nuanced in exploring the works of ethnic minority scholars (e.g., Aung and Yu, Goodwin, Kiang, Moll and colleagues, and Thao). Their work supports the overall argument of this dissertation, noting that the voices of ethnic minorities, and indeed Asian Americans, often are ignored in the American K-12 system. This absence may explain why some Cambodian parents feel disconnected, if not completely disempowered from the need to strengthen relationships with school partners. A discussion of the educational experiences of Southeast Asian Americans also is explored, which is intended to help the reader better understand the broader issues impacting this subgroup of Asian Americans. The review then moves into a more nuanced discussion of Cambodian Americans, given the ethnicity and cultural

background of the respondents for this dissertation. It explores who they are and the challenges they continue to face as new refugees and immigrants in the United States. The review ends with a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of previous studies regarding family-school partnerships and family involvement in education.

Moving beyond Generalities of Families

Research suggests that family involvement may have a positive impact on the education of children (Lopez, 2001; Pho, 2007; Thao, 2003). One type of family involvement is family-school partnerships. While a preponderance of data underscores the impact of family-school partnerships on improving various students outcomes (Epstein, 1995, 2001a, 2001b, 2008; Epstein & Salinas, 2004; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Henderson, Mapp, Johnson & Davies, 2007; Stevenson & Baker, 1987), it is unclear whether extant family-school partnership literature and research are useful to many families of Cambodian heritage, largely because few, if any, empirical attempts are made to systematically document the nature of such partnership and its impact on those families.

However, before reviewing extant research and literature on family involvement and family-school partnerships, it may be useful to review Cremin's (1974) nominal work on the issue of families as educators, and how his theory contributes to the field of education more broadly and family-school partnerships more specifically.

Cremin's Families as Educators

Cremin (1974) reviewed the historiography of the family as educators. His work was integral in helping us better understand why families also are important educators, in

addition to teachers at school. This is important to point out, because it helped to set the foundation for the idea that learning happens across contexts. Children can and do learn outside of school; they also learn from parents, siblings, peers, neighbors, community members, religious leaders, to name those few. Thus, children acquire significant knowledge at home and in the community. Cremin found that a good number of family studies may be linked to issues of education, but they often were general. That is, family studies were more often drawn from issues of socialization and enculturation or the individual family. And because of that, Cremin noted that past and present studies of families as educators were somewhat linear, because they "assume that only one thing at a time is being taught." As a result, those studies did not account for the "cross-pressures" that existed within or outside of the family. Cross-pressures can be taken to mean the multiple layers that not only defined but complicated the lives of families.

He argued, "Family historians, much like school historians, have often erroneously assumed that what is intended by parents when they teach or nurture is what they actually end up doing and that what they actually end up doing is ultimately effective" (p. 255). That perspective can be limiting, because it only assumed that parents taught children. But Cremin maintained that such views dismissed the idea that children also taught parents, just as much as parents taught other parents or children taught other children. Thus, family interactions were complex and, as Cremin suggested, studies of families as educators must account for the "cross-pressures" that enabled researchers to better understand their lives. One might assume that such generalities perpetuated a misguided view of families as overly simplistic. The reality may be that families were varied and different.

Because of such views, Cremin's thinking around families as educators were influential. On many levels, it shaped the way contemporary researchers view the role of families in the context of education. Because of its influence, I wanted to highlight his definition of education, and the integral role families played. Cremin (1974) noted,

> It defines education as the deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to transmit, evoke, or acquire knowledge, values, attitudes, skills, and sensibilities (and the results of that effort)…It acknowledges that education generally proceeds via many individuals and institutions – parents, peers, siblings, and friends as well as families, churches, libraries, museums, summer camps, schools, and colleges. It assumes, too, that the various educators in a community often relate to one another in configurations, though it cautions that such relationships may be dissonant as well as consonant, contradictory as well as complementary. And it assumes finally that individuals come to educational situations with their own temperaments, histories, and purposes, that different individuals will interact with any given educational institution or configuration in different ways and with different outcomes, and that in considering the interactions and the outcomes it is as necessary to examine the lives of those undergoing education as it is to examine the efforts of the educators (p. 256).

In accepting Cremin's theory, one also supports the idea that education is far from linear. Multiple people interact in varied and complex ways. Indeed, this can be viewed as non-linear. Thus, we understand educative experiences based on the multiple players who are as much a part of the process, as they are the outcome. And, Cremin's theory of families as educators plays a leading role in helping researchers like myself better grapple with the complexities of families as educators. These theories have received a great deal of attention in recent years.

Over thirty years ago, Cremin predicted that a growing body of research would challenge, and thus be critical of, the generalities often afforded to the understanding of families as educators. In an almost chilling way, he concluded by saying "we shall come

to see the family anew as the crucially important educator it has always been" (p. 257). The counterpoint to that argument would be that the family – as a unit of analysis – either would have little or no importance in contemporary studies of education. It would become obsolete. However, current research trends, particularly among ethnic minority researchers, would say otherwise, as they often supported invariably Cremin's position. Cremin was not far from the truth, as my study of families as educators, for example, emerged to challenge the theoretical generalities of traditional family involvement and family-school partnership models.

Leichter's Family Stories and Memories

Leichter's (1997) work on family stories and memories supports the notion that families are important educators, building on Cremin's work. Going a step further, she addresses the use of probes and other mechanisms to help families engage in rich discussions about their personal lived experiences, which they can then share with teachers. This work is pivotal in helping families to talk, especially those – like many Cambodians – who may feel disempowered or who may need help in remembering past events that may be somewhat difficult to share. However, Leichter does acknowledge that researchers should not force people to talk about things beyond their will. Indeed, families are important educators with lots to share, and teachers working with families can learn from these family stories and memories.

Leichter referred to the use of sharing family stories and memories as a way to better understand people's lives, as opposed to more abstract or rigid forms of learning about families, which often is the case with efforts to link families and schools. Thus, she believed that stories of families are far too complex to be placed into "general terms"

and “rubrics” that may take away from their ability to share authentically who they are. Leichter asserted that “it is necessary to describe these successes in ways that do not gloss over the complexities and possible counterreactions” (p. 74), because doing so may not only lack authenticity, but it may be condescending to families. Through shared stories, however, Leichter argued that we can understand issues from multiple perspectives – from all concerned parties. As a result, partners may be better able to collaborate more effectively, and that includes bringing together different cultures of the home and schools in order to support children’s learning process.

In sharing stories and memories, Leichter addressed the power of “that reminds me of,” which often triggered other stories that enabled school partners, for example, to develop a greater sense of empathy for and awareness of family members. In part, this may have been because such stories painted a deeper, complex picture of their lived realities. This was particularly important because family-school interactions tended to be infrequent, and the few opportunities available often did not afford families the ability to engage in deeper discussions. However, when opportunities were present, stories can be shared through more formal meetings between families, teachers, and school administrators, though “more often family stories emerge in the context of other discussions of family-school relationships and learning in families” (p. 67). Thus, informal opportunities often enable families to talk about their stories in ways that are less interrupted, because rigid structures do not interfere in storytelling – there is more room for discovery.

Taken together, the process of storytelling is important, she purported, because “listening to and reflecting on family stories helped us to understand what needs to be

done so that families and schools may join more effectively to improve the learning of children who live and learn in both places" (p. 63). One is then led to believe that the home-school connection is important, particularly if one considers the idea that children deal with challenges not only at school, but also at home and in the community. As a result, one can further assume that teachers alone cannot solve every problem encountered by the child. Rather, they require the support and assistance of families and community partners, particularly "if the educational reforms that would reduce inequalities are to succeed" (p. 63). Providing adequate time and space for families to share their experiences – through family stories and family memories – with school partners is important, in part because it affords each family the opportunity to share their authentic voices. With that, school and community partners may be able to find specific solutions to help young people engage learning opportunities that are perhaps more meaningful to them.

Epstein's Family-School Partnerships

Joyce Epstein has conducted a significant amount of research on family-school partnerships. She noted that family and school partnerships have many positive benefits, because "they can improve school programs and school climate, provide family services and support, increase families' skills and leadership, connect families with others in the school and in the community, and help teachers with their work" (1995, 701). Family-school partnerships often worked more effectively when influenced by the school, family, and community contexts in which students interact, learn, grow, and socialize. She referred to these contexts as "spheres of influence." Spheres of influence often

overlapped to benefit the learning and growing process of children (Epstein, 1995, 2001a, 2001b, 2008).

Epstein (1995) noted there were external and internal models of overlapping spheres of influence. The external model recognized that the three main contexts may be drawn together or pushed apart. For example, schools, families, and communities may have some practices that they conducted separately and others collectively. Practices shaped the child in positive ways, because together or alone they influenced the learning and developmental process. The internal model referred to complex and essential interpersonal relations and patterns of influence built collectively by individuals at school, home and in community settings. Epstein further acknowledged that the spheres of influence created opportunities for families and schools to share their experiences with community organizations working to improve the lives of families and children. In this theory, the focal child was at the center of the partnership, and without their voice, input, and involvement, the partnership would not be complete. She noted that effective school-family-community partnerships should not aim to "produce" successful students, but rather "engage, guide, energize, and motivate students to produce their own success" (Epstein, 1995, 702).

Are family-school partnerships related to academic achievement? A growing body of empirical evidence suggests that academic achievement is positively related to strong family-school partnerships (Epstein, 1995, 2001a, 2001b, 2008; Epstein & Salinas, 2004; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Stevenson & Baker, 1987) with a great deal of attention centered on teacher involvement (see Stevenson & Baker, 1987). Research also indicates that some immigrant families overcome certain barriers (e.g., limited English

proficiency) in order to be involved in their children's academic life (Goldenberg, 1987). That sense of involvement appears to be positively related to the level of optimism and achievement for children of those immigrants (Kao & Tienda, 1995; for more information regarding the immigrant experience and education, see Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). While families across income levels appear to care about their child's academic performance (Catsambis, 1998), what appears to be unclear is how to help ethnic minority families access information to navigate the American school system. That information may be useful in assisting children with academic work and other issues related to school. That type of information might speak to specific cultural expectations and values of ethnic minority families (see Aung & Yu, 2007; Kiang, 2004a; Kiang, 2004b; Lopez, 2001; Pho, 2007; Silva, 2001; Thao, 2007).

In "A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement," Anne Henderson and Karen Mapp provided one of the most exhaustive studies on the impact of family involvement on student achievement. Their study made many assumptions. First, family members were deeply concerned about their child's performance in and out of school – despite race, ethnicity, class, or cultural variation. They also found that white, middle-class families tended to be more involved in the academic affairs of their children in school. Schools that succeeded in engaging families often shared three overlapping themes: 1) relationships were developed based on trust and reciprocity among family, school, and community members; 2) the needs and concerns of family members were respected and addressed, in addition to class and cultural differences; and 3) this relationship shared power and responsibility. Henderson and Mapp also found that the mother's level of education

affected the level of involvement in school-related activities, and the younger the child, the more involved the family member was likely to be. Gender was also a factor, namely because mothers tended to be more involved in the academic lives of their sons.

Family-School Partnerships and Problems

Epstein and Voorhis (2010) argued that school counselors ought to play a stronger leadership role in creating effective family-school partnerships, suggesting that “these programs, in which teachers, administrators, school counselors, parents, and community partners collaborate, help schools to involve more families…and prevent or reduce the problems that school counselors, presently, try to solve alone” (p. 1). They noted that schools often reported fewer disciplinary actions when effective family-school partnerships were created between teachers, families, and school counselors. Thus, involving parents in specific activities such as mentoring and safety patrols often improved student behavior and reduced disciplinary actions, because these were practices that parents could then use at home. Counselors would share those effective practices with parents.

Furthermore, Epstein and Voorhis noted, “Some teachers think that they, alone, are responsible for children's learning and success in school. They discuss ‘my children’ as if there were no teachers before them and no parents engaged for the long term in students' lives and education” (p. 7). By stating this, they may have suggested that teachers were not the only adults responsible for ensuring that young people learn and succeed in school. There were multiple other partners that included parents, community leaders, principals, administrators, and counselors. However, they also added, “[S]ome

school counselors think that they, alone, are responsible for solving students' problems, as if neither teachers nor parents were critical partners for students in trouble...all partners who care about students have roles to play in both prevention and treatment interventions" (p. 7). This statement implies that teachers and counselors should work together more effectively, because they alone are not responsible for helping young people succeed. Epstein and Voorhis recommended that schools work with counselors to allocate 20 percent of their time focused on taking a more active leadership role, particularly in working with teachers, families, and community partners to strengthen family-school partnerships.

Family Involvement in Education

What role do family members play in educating children? Academic literature covers a wide array of topics on family involvement. This includes the impact of parenting style and practices (Paulson, 1994; Spera, 2005), family values (Barlow, 2001; Lopez, 2001; Okagaki et al., 1995), beliefs (e.g., Paulson, 1994), and family-school partnerships (Epstein, 1995, 2001a, 2001b, 2008; Epstein & Salinas, 2004; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Henderson, Mapp, Johnson & Davies, 2007; Stevenson & Baker, 1987). Each type of involvement impacts how families may influence the way young individuals approach learning in school and at home. For example, some researchers note that a child's obligation to the family can be positively associated with a greater belief in the importance and usefulness of education, and this often increases their academic motivation (Fuligni, 2001; see also Barlow, 2001). That may cut across low- and high-achieving students alike, from all socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds (Catsambis,

1998). Furthermore, Leichter (1974, 2) pointed out that "the family is always a setting in which important educational encounters occur."

But what are the implications of listening to ethnic minority voices with regard to family involvement in education? In my review of the literature, I came across numerous empirical studies on the views of ethnic minority family involvement in education. Some reviews included unpublished doctoral dissertations. These studies examined varying differences between ethnic minority family members and teachers/school staff.

For example, Silva's (2001) unpublished dissertation attempted to investigate and document familial views toward cultural differences and family involvement in the education of their children. That study was a qualitative case study in which open-ended interviews were used to collect data. Three families (i.e., Native, Hispanic, and Mayan) from a southwestern Head Start Program were examined. Findings suggested that, contrary to the perception of the teachers, families perceived themselves as being very much involved in the education of their children. Their view of involvement in their child's education entailed teaching morals, manners, being obedient to teachers, and teaching important cultural values and expectations. Silva noted that this type of family involvement was somewhat different from traditional conceptions of involvement, especially from the dominant culture: family members for her study were involved by being emotionally invested, versus the emotional *and* physical investment many teachers expected family members to make in school-based activities/functions. Silva also found that misunderstanding during intercultural communication (between teachers and families) led teachers to believe that culturally-diverse families were not involved in the education of their children.

Sandoval's (2007) unpublished dissertation also examined the perceptions of families of Native-American elementary and secondary students. This also was a qualitative study in which interviews were used to collect data. The goal of the study was to explore families' perceptions of involvement in their children's education with the end goal of informing education policies at the local and state levels. Sandoval found that the voices of Native-American families were significantly underrepresented in the literature, which prompted the study. Specifically, Sandoval found that family involvement in education for Native guardians meant learning about the culture of the Native people and teaching these important values to their children so they can become good people. Involvement in their child's education also meant being a good role model. Informants also believed that it was their responsibility to teach not only their children but other Native children about the importance of being a good person and taking care of the community. Guardians also highlighted the significance of being physically involved in their child's school, as that may contribute to academic achievement. However, they went on to suggest that schools should create a warm and inclusive environment for families in order to make them feel more comfortable in participating and being involved in schools.

Fuligni (2001) investigated the relationship between academic motivation and obligation to the family among adolescents of Asian, Latin American, and European backgrounds. He found that Chinese, Filipino, Mexican, and Central and South American youths were more likely to spend more time taking care of their siblings, helping out around the house, assisting their families, and spending time with the family, as compared to European-American youths. One chief explanation was the strong sense

of obligation non-European students had to the family. Fuligni suggested that non-European youths maintained their obligation to the family well into adulthood, and “there is a greater tendency for youths from immigrant families to believe that such duties are lifelong obligations [and, as a result] adolescents from American-born Asian and Latin American families endorse such a belief more strongly than their European American peers do” (2000, 62).

The same research study found that Asian and Latin American students were also likely to make more sacrifices for the family compared to European counterparts. For example, immigrant youths factored in family wishes when they made an important decision about their own personal lives. While Fuligni admitted that the motivating factors behind immigrant youth family obligation was unclear (e.g., did they fear family disproval or estrangement, was this built into the general family value system, etc.), he did suggest that the “youths’ sense of obligation will lead to greater postsecondary educational persistence” (2000, 72), in part because of the high value placed on meeting those critical family expectations. It appeared that immigrant youths placed a great deal of importance on the family, and that sense of obligation to the family helped them to succeed in the educational setting.

Family Income and Involvement

Family income level appears to be one mitigating factor on student outcomes. Hill (2001) noted that students from lower income families consistently performed more poorly than children from middle or higher income levels, given the immediate stresses of under-resourced environments on the child’s learning and lived experience. Moreover, children from lower income backgrounds were more likely to be identified by their

teachers as being at risk for serious academic adjustment problems. In making that argument, Hill examined the relationships between parenting style and children's school readiness among 103 African-American and Euro-American kindergarten children, mothers, and teachers. The goal was to examine how family income and ethnicity affected relationships between parenting behaviors, parental expectations, school involvement, and school performance.

There were two major findings in this study. First, for lower income families, parenting had a much stronger relationship with pre-reading performance. Second, ethnicity affected parental school involvement and children's school performance. Family income appeared to affect school performance for many lower income students, because of "the stress associated with many low-income environments that often diminishes early school performance [which] may be buffered by supportive parenting" (Hill, 2001, 94). One might argue that lower income family members often got involved in their child's life, in part because they wanted to protect and shield them from a variety of risk factors found in and around the home and community environment. Thus, it appears that school involvement for these family members emphasize the importance of keeping children safe, which includes protecting them from the lure of the streets (see Aung & Yu, 2007). For higher income families, adults appear to get involved because they wanted to ensure their children were given the support required, in order to do well academically and in life. Hill recognized that higher income students often experienced "fewer obstacles to interfere with school performance and a greater number of resources to enhance performance or make up for poorer parenting practices" (2001, 94). To this

end, Hill suggested that family involvement may buffer some of the disadvantages associated with low income status.

Traub (2000) echoed some of the concerns presented by Hill. Improving educational opportunities for some children seemed to require increased family involvement, especially those from under-resourced families. He noted that the "school…is not as powerful an institution as it seems [and] whom you hang out with, both during and after school, can matter more than what happens in the classroom" (p. 52). For example, many Southeast Asian families are still caught in the complex web of poverty and urban isolation decades after their arrival in the US, settling into under-resourced areas (see also Uy, 2007). As a result, many children of Southeast Asian heritage continue to confront similar challenges faced by those generations before them. Their stories, unfortunately, echo a familiar pattern of scores of poor urban African American and Latino youths (see, for example, SEARAC, 2008). Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001) underscored this familiar pattern, indicating that "as more Asian immigrants find themselves in poor and segregated schools, they face the same limited opportunities of other immigrants of color" (p. 135). Parker, Greer, and Zuckerman (1988) argued that children living in poverty experience double jeopardy, given the double impact of poverty and isolation generated at home and how those factors may impact children when they go to school. To address these concerns, Weissbourd (1996) suggested that educators and other professionals should focus on "the interactions between the child and the environment [in order to stay] faithful to the dynamic qualities and complexities of the child's life" (p. 33).

Ethnic Minority Family-School Partnerships

This section explores a more nuanced discussion of family-school partnerships, particularly for ethnic minority families and communities. This may help the reader to consider the implications of how these families choose to interact with school partners, as they support their children at school. It may also help the reader to better understand the implications of generalizing such partnerships for families that may not have a sufficient command of English, or who may not fully understand how to navigate the American school system. As a result, these families may not feel comfortable interacting with teachers, counselors, and principals.

For example, Moll and colleagues (1992) examined family and school connections among working-class, Mexican-American communities. The aim of this study was to help classroom teachers identify innovative teaching practices that were based on "funds of knowledge." They took "funds of knowledge" to mean what children learned at home or in the community, which was based on the accumulation of families' history and cultural skills and knowledge that shaped them. Some "funds" included agriculture and mining, construction, repair, folk medicine, and religion. Learning in the home/community environment was based on practical "exchanges" between home/community partners. Because of its practicality, such funds may be useful to the young person's learning experience. The authors also claimed that findings from their study would "organize classroom instruction that far exceeds in quality the rote-like instruction these children commonly encounter in schools" (p. 132).

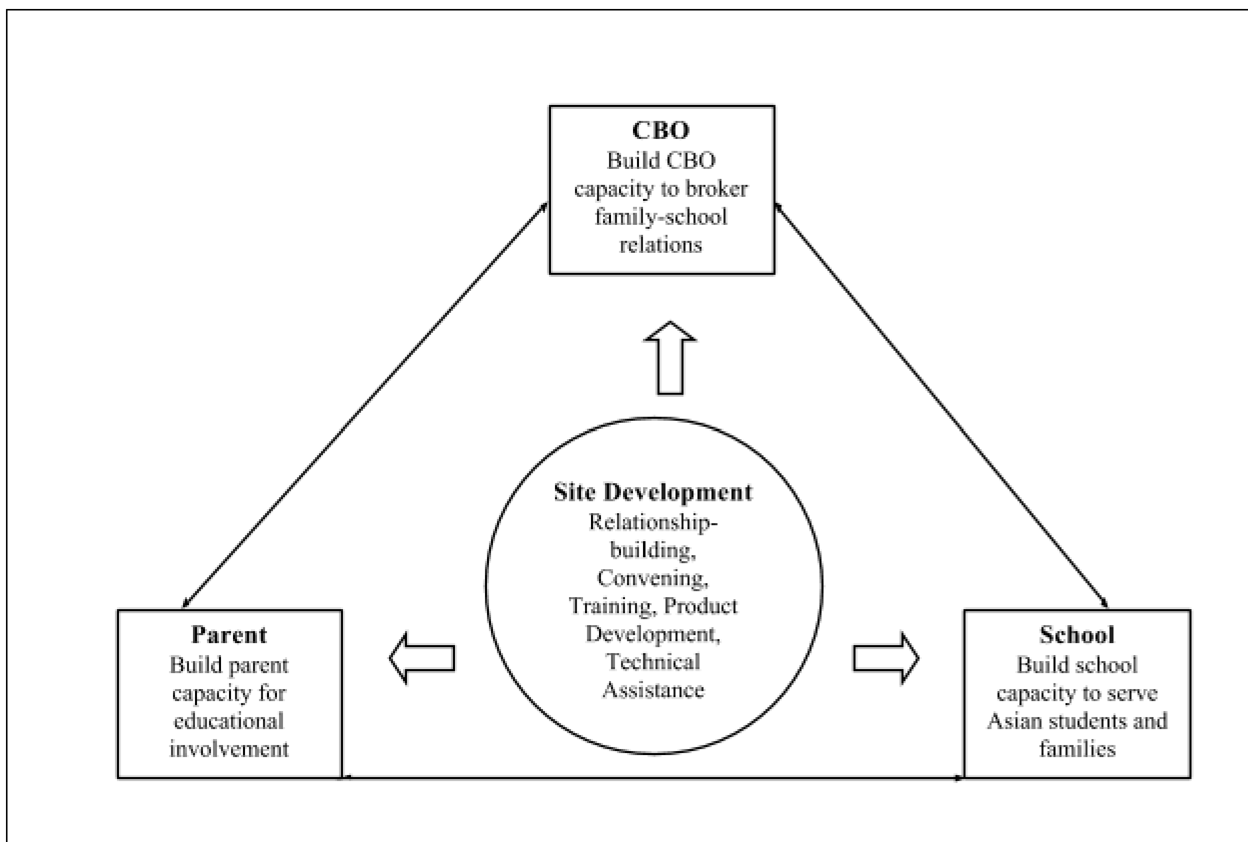
Moll and colleagues highlighted two key characteristics of the household funds of knowledge that stood in "sharp contrast" to classroom practices. First, they suggested that family and community partners were "teachers" who knew, if not understood, the "whole" child, as opposed to teachers who commonly acknowledged the young person solely as a "student" often in an isolated classroom. They claimed that classrooms were detached from the "social worlds" of the community setting, and that may limit a teacher's full understanding of the child. Household "teachers" understood the whole child because they were familiar with the many "spheres of activity" within which both the child and adult were immersed.

Second, Moll and colleagues asserted that home and community partners relied heavily on the notion of mutual trust ("confianza") and reciprocity, which further created a deeper sense of interdependency among these partners. Home and community partners relied on each other for a variety of support. As a result, they formed social relationships "on a more enduring basis" which suggested that relationships were developed over a longer period of time. They further noted that trust and reciprocity occurred each time families and young people interacted with other members of the community (e.g., neighbors, relatives, friends), in addition to multiple practical opportunities for young people to acquire knowledge. They brought such "funds of knowledge" to school, which teachers then used to innovate instructional practices inside the classroom.

One case study examines family-school partnerships for Southeast Asian American families. The National Coalition of Advocates for Students (NCAS) collaborated with the Harvard Family Research Project on a study titled, *Capacity Building for Southeast Asian Family-School Partnerships*. Sites where programs were

implemented for families were established in nine cities with a significant presence of Southeast Asians (i.e., Minneapolis, Philadelphia, Des Moines, Chicago, Houston, Seattle, San Diego, Richmond, and St. Petersburg). The project's overall strategy was intended to create an effective partnership, with shared ownership among families, schools, and community partners (See Figure 1). Through this project, parents were expected to increase their knowledge of various issues, build advocacy skills, and create relationships with school partners. Community partners were expected to increase their knowledge base, build skills to help train parents, and promote coalitions. School partners also were expected to increase their knowledge base, build community relationships, and make school improvements.

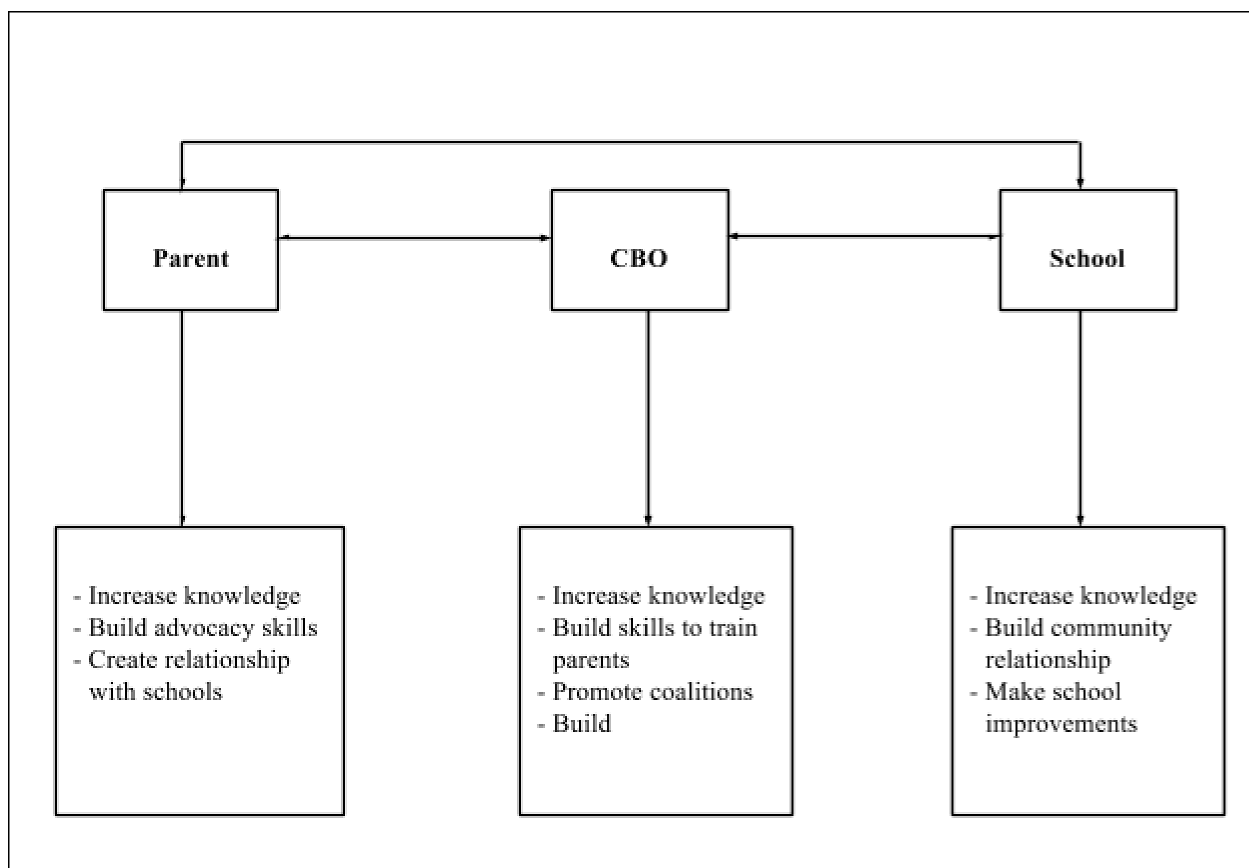
This Southeast Asian family-school partnership had many objectives (See Figure 2). First, NCAS leveraged skills and disseminated information to parents in order to more effectively engage learning with children. Second, NCAS fostered an environment whereby community partners could mediate and broker family-school relationships, given the cultural and linguistic bridge between them. Third, school leaders and staff members were asked to dismantle old cultural stereotypes, and they were re-educated to respond to the needs of families and children. Fourth, NCAS made efforts to support continuous site learning through newsletter, annual conferences, telephone consultations, and site visits. Fifth, relationship building, convening, training, product development, and technical assistance significantly contributed to site developments.



Source: Adopted from National Coalition of Advocates for Students (2000, 2)

Figure 1

NCAS Strategy for Asian Family-School-Community Partnership



Source: Adopted from National Coalition of Advocates for Students (2000, 3)

Figure 2

Site Development Objectives

Unlike prior studies, however, the NCAS study worked directly with Southeast Asian parents, listening to their intended voices, as they found ways to build effective partnerships with school and community partners. It also addressed how culture and language may impact learning and understanding. In terms of creating relevant cultural tools, the NCAS conducted training (e.g., for parents on ways to become involved with the school system) and promoted information sharing through community meetings, and that gave families the space to speak up and to have their voices heard. The project director at the time, Bouy Te, now with the National Education Association (NEA),

spoke to this point, “The project’s position is always getting more parents to speak up on all the issues, to get parents to be informed” (as cited in NCAS, 2000, 7).

NCAS also worked with community partners and families to have meetings and training sessions, in addition to creating Southeast Asian parent-teacher associations, while supporting the development of those that were already in existence. These associations helped to sustain family involvement in schools over time. Other notable benefits of the model included developing advocacy skills to convince a high school principal to open a special six-week summer school in English and math for Vietnamese students, for example. And for three consecutive years, a widely attended parent-student meeting was created to address intergenerational issues.

The NCAS study built on the idea that family-school partnerships tended to work more effectively when influenced by school, family, and community partners, in which students were given the necessary tools to interact, learn, grow, and socialize (Epstein, 1995). The NCAS model also demonstrated that working with ethnic minority family members, and more importantly, giving them the opportunity to have their voices heard, provided critical information to all partners involved in this partnership. It also empowered family members to develop the confidence necessary to speak up. However, despite its benefits to the Southeast Asian community, the study recognized that “its staff members do not underestimate the barriers to family-school partnerships” and that “cultural differences continually need to be addressed, even among the younger generation of parents” (2000, 8).

Southeast Asian Educational Experiences

A small but growing body of Southeast Asian scholars and researchers (e.g., Aung & Yu, 2007; Kiang, 2004a; Kiang, 2004b; Pho 2007; Thao, 2003; Uy, 2007) has examined critical challenges facing a number of low-income Southeast Asian students, particularly in under-resourced American public school systems. For example, in "Does the System Work for Cambodian American Students?" Khin Mai Aung and Nancy Yu explored different interconnected factors that impacted the educational experiences of Cambodian youth in Lowell, MA. Some factors included the challenges and root causes contributing to the high dropout rate of Cambodian youths, the cultural and linguistic barriers of family members, financial constraints, the cultural differences between family members and school staff, low levels of family educational attainment, the inability of family members to maneuver within the American education system, and the prevalence of gang life.

Aung and Yu (2007) examined the educational attainment of individuals who were 18 years and over in Lowell. They found that 55.6% of Cambodians were without a high school degree, compared to 46.3% of Hispanics or Latinos (of any race), 42.3% Non-Hispanic Asians, 22.1% Non-Hispanic Whites, and 15.9% of Non-Hispanic Blacks or African Americans. Some researchers argue that educational attainment is a strong indicator of upward mobility (e.g., Kao & Tienda, 1995). Aung and Yu also noted that many Cambodian students "were falling through the cracks of an overcrowded and underresourced public school system – leading many students to be truant or drop out"

(p. 88). They further noted that “out-of-school youth were more likely to become involved in the criminal justice system” (p. 89) and that “Cambodian students…don’t know how to seek assistance from their teachers, don’t think the teachers understand them, and sometimes they seek outside help that may not be positive” (p. 102). Citing a personal communication, Aung and Yu noted that some youth often looked to gang members as a surrogate family, largely in response to failures or frustration in dealing with the school system “especially if their parents are not engaged in their education and an older sibling is already involved with a gang – offering the ‘instant gratification’ of needed support and belonging” (p. 102). Research suggests that family involvement may have a positive effect on young people, including improvements in student outcomes, which could help Southeast Asian youths at school (see, for example, Pho, 2007; Thao, 2003). This was particularly true for young individuals at risk of school failure (see Nakkula and Pineda, 2005).

Aung and Yu also examined the implications of cultural and linguistic barriers among Cambodian family members and children and the impact of those barriers on educational experiences. Many Cambodian family members, they noted, “lack formal education themselves and/or do not understand how to maneuver within the American education system” (2007, 93). Quoting an anonymous youth advocate, the authors stated that “some parents themselves never even graduated from middle school, so they don’t push their children at all…Even though they value education, it’s like their dream and reality is a different story” (p. 93). Cambodian family members’ inability to maneuver through the school system may in part be a result of their inexperience not only with the US public education system, but also school systems in Cambodia.

Cambodian family members in the US often were uncomfortable interacting and dealing with American educators, particularly if there was a problem at school. Cambodian family members often believed that "the school is supposed to take care of [their] kids when they're in school and [the families' own] job is to discipline the kids" (Aung & Yu, 2007, 94). The authors further posited that "because of these cultural barriers, as well as linguistic and educational challenges, many Cambodian parents…are unable to advocate effectively for their children in the public education system" (p. 94). The authors suggested that one key solution was to strengthen the communication between family members and the school system.

Working with another Southeast Asian group, Thao (2003) interviewed a small sample of twenty-seven Hmong elementary school students, family members, and teachers serving those students. The intent of the study was to determine how, and to what extent, home and school factors interacted in order to impact the educational experiences of students. Findings from that study suggested that the differences in culture (or, what Thao referred to as "cultural clash") at school and at home tended to complicate the learning experiences of students. For example, teachers and family members experienced some degree of difficulty with regard to understanding the other group's culture, which affected children at home and school. Essentially, children were having trouble negotiating their role in both the home and school contexts. However, the author noted that families and schools can be empowered by developing a culturally relevant curriculum. Thao noted that "a lack of familiarity with the Mong [sic] people and their culture makes contact between educators and Mong [sic] parents very difficult. This study indicated that the Mong [sic] parents feel the people who live in the United

States are not very friendly" (2003, 38). Secondly, school officials should aim to create a school environment that places a significant degree of importance on learning and respecting the Hmong culture. Schools should also make practical and policy efforts to utilize families as critical resources, which implies that creating a family-school partnership honoring the culture and the voices of these Southeast Asian families may be useful in connecting family members and teachers.

Pho (2007) examined the interplay between family education and academic performance among Southeast Asian students, specifically the foundation upon which family education was formulated, how cultural values and family life may influence the academic performance of their children, and the nature of families and school relationship. This research was based on a survey of 102 Southeast Asian high school students and a case study of two Cambodian, two Laotian, and two Vietnamese families, from the pool of students surveyed. Students were also asked to keep essays, which the researcher used as a data source. Findings from the data suggested that "the voices emerging from these short stories and poems were more compelling than any available statistical reports" (2007, 71), because the challenges and opportunities individuals faced at home and in school were revealed to the researcher. For example, in an interview with a male Vietnamese student, the following was revealed:

> What we learned in school sometimes was different from what we were taught at home, because some of the Vietnamese values were different from the American values, and our behavior as a result of the traditional Vietnamese values and parents' teachings make us different from other students; and most teachers do not understand that. While our teachers wanted us to talk in class and to be independent, our parents wanted us to be quiet and respect older people (Pho, 2007, 70).

That particular Vietnamese student was attempting to explain some of the cultural differences (or "cultural clashes") between the home and school environments. Disparate cultural expectations of families and teachers compelled many refugee students, and in this case a Southeast Asian student, to negotiate the cultural boundary of two important settings with adult figures.

Regarding the nature of family and school partnerships, Pho purported that the "notion of parental participation in school was very different between parents and teachers. While teachers complained that family members rarely came to school open houses or attended teacher-parent conferences, family members thought they participated sufficiently in their children's school education by reminding their children to do homework and teaching them the value of education" (2007, 81). Southeast Asian family members may believe that teaching their children the value of hard work, determination, and a strong work ethic constituted an involvement in the child's education, without being physically present or active in school-based activities/functions (for similar issues regarding other ethnic minority families, see Lopez, 2001; Silva, 2001). However, Pho acknowledged that the values of the family as educators may also have some potential adverse effects, including the forceful nature of some family members to dictate what the child should study in college, without the child's consent, or an overprotective parenting style that limited the young person's ability to attend college far away from home, which tended to affect girls more than boys. Pho's study raised important issues regarding the nature of family education and academic performance for Southeast Asian families and students, and how families, students, and teachers can work together. A strong premium

was placed on understanding how cultural values and linguistic barriers may impact the learning process.

Other scholars interested in Southeast Asians address related issues in education. For example, Kiang (2004b) documented a series of strategies developed within an Asian American Studies Program at one urban public university in order to impact the education of K-12 students and teachers. Four critical challenges were presented about issues that were facing K-12 practitioners in the Asian American Studies field: 1) the complex demographic realities of Asian American populations; 2) the exclusion of Asian American Studies content in the K-12 curriculum; 3) the limited flow of Asian Americans into the field of education; and 4) the confounding impact of high-stakes testing across all these areas. The same article described six specific interventions by a university-based Asian American Studies program, with one focused on "advocacy capacity-building for Asian-American parents and families" (p. 217). In discussing these interventions, Kiang addressed prevailing issues that confront Southeast Asian families:

> For a variety of reasons, ranging from long work hours and lack of transportation to internalized perceptions about cultural roles and their own English competence, Asian American parents frequently have minimal direct involvement in their children's schools, even though they often express high expectations for students' academic achievement…Schools, in turn, often exclude Asian American parents from meaningful participation as a result of the language barrier, lack of training and cultural sensitivity, poor outreach and follow-up, and lack of respect. Yet, with parents as the initial, most influential 'teachers' in children's lives, educators who remain unaware of students' home environments are unable either to make curricular connections to students' lives or to provide appropriate support when students confront difficulties (2004b, 217-218).

With regard to the intervention, Kiang designed programmatic strategies to strengthen the capacity of Asian American family members to intervene in school,

specifically by expanding the literature on children's books with specific Southeast Asian themes and characters. The program, organized around an undergraduate course (i.e., Southeast Asians in America), examined the process of migration, refugee resettlement, and community development for Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian families. It also examined critical themes relevant to those communities, including issues of trauma, healing, and resilience, in addition to the "changing contexts of families, communities, schools, public policies, and homeland relations" (Kiang, 2004b, 218).

Through the project, students were able to apply what they learned about Southeast Asian American history, culture, and community life. Their review of extant literature in libraries and bookstores indicated two things. First, it indicated the dearth of texts available regarding the larger Southeast Asian American community. Second, the content of the few books available was restricted to traditional folk tales, war stories, and mainstream immigrant acculturation themes. Consequently, books produced by the students dealt with contemporary issues facing second- and third-generation Southeast Asian Americans, including the influence of the Hip Hop culture and Black and Latino peers. Kiang's study reinforced the importance of understanding the culture of Southeast Asian families, and that included how family members made sense of cultural expectations of educating and raising children. Those factors may differ between the home and school setting.

Goodwin (2010) explored the curriculum as colonizer for Asian Americans. Her work was pivotal for this study in that it attempted to explain the negative implications of the standard American K-12 curriculum, which does not account for Asian-American voices. On many levels, it disempowers marginalized ethnic minorities by "colonizing"

the minds of Asian Americans, which of course includes Southeast Asian American students, as curricular contents reinforce the notion of the "perpetual foreigner." While she discusses learning implications for young people, her research was helpful for this dissertation, because it makes the case that the American educational system in general, within which the curriculum is embedded, does not necessarily create an environment that invites people of color, including Cambodian Americans, to have their voices heard. This may explain why some Cambodian families may feel disengaged, if not completely disempowered, from reaching out to teachers. It also may prevent families from being more involved in activities led and run by school partners, many of whom represent the interests of middle-class, white Americans. With regard to Asian and Pacific Islanders (APIs), Goodwin mentioned that "the curricular silence surrounding [them] seems designed to reinforce [their] status as perpetual foreigners…Curriculum clearly transmits the message that they hold no membership in the 'American' story" (p. 3122). One might argue that the families and parents of these students hold no membership in this story.

Goodwin addressed both historical and contemporary contexts within which schools were/are used to "educate" young people in "Americanizing" them. That tended to apply to students who were/are deemed ethnically and culturally different from White Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPs). She went on to note that curriculum – as a tool to acquire both subject matter content and the acculturation of mainstream American values, "represents…the economic and social interests of those in power" (p. 3111), and as such, it was believed to contribute to inequalities perhaps over generations.

Goodwin also noted that the process of colonization took form when marginalized groups accepted "hidden messages about themselves," in which "systematic (and systemic) withholding of adequate resources, strong teachers and rich educational opportunities…teaches them about their (in)significance and place in U.S. society" (p. 3112). Thus, typically non-White racial and ethnic minority groups were often led to accept contents taught from curricula as a truism, and that was problematic because there was little to no room for input from members outside of the dominant group. And because dominant members had limited cultural knowledge of members outside of their group, curricula tended to be culturally inappropriate and/or irrelevant. Furthermore, non-White groups often had no say in the construction or teaching of the "regular" curricula. Their voices are not accounted for.

Yet, even as researchers and scholars recognized the implications of curriculum as colonizer, Goodwin further pointed out that the API group remained invisible, in part given the "model minority" myth which presumed falsely that they were exemplars of academic excellence (see also AsianWeek, 2008). Perpetuating this socially constructed stereotype, she noted, "obscures the hardships, racism, struggles, and injustices that characterize the lives of many Asian Americans" (p. 3113). Gross generalizations of APIs without disaggregating for ethnicity may overshadow critical knowledge about this community that can inform and strengthen both curricula and pedagogy.

There were three specific curricular contexts which she explored – the *No Child Left Behind Act*, culturally relevant pedagogy, and the "model minority" myth. In referring to the Model Minority Curriculum, as the curriculum of othering, for example, Goodwin maintained that API youths were often wrongly judged with false socially

constructed stereotypes. She noted, "Whichever way they turn, API students confront, are judged by, and are measured against the Model Minority *Curriculum* that first assigns them a false and constructed identity – effectively silencing and segregating them, and then exploits them by putting them on display as proof of an equitable and non-racist America, and a school system that meets the needs of *all* children" (pp. 3125-3126, italics in original). In response to this, she acknowledged the importance of developing culturally-relevant curriculum as a "site of resistance." One example of this "resistance" was for teachers to rethink teacher preparation curricula, in order to challenge "preservice teachers' expectations, assumptions, beliefs, and preconceived notions about children, such as APIs who are labeled 'different' …*before* they enter the classroom" (p. 3127-3128). This afforded teachers the opportunity to "strip down" any previously constructed (mis)understanding and stereotype of APIs, as they attempted to rebuild a better and more accurate understanding of these people, based on the shared experiences and authentic voices of APIs. That "resistance" was aligned with one of the major objectives of the NCAS (2000) study, in which school partners were given opportunities to dismantle old cultural stereotypes in order to better address the needs of families and children.

Ethnic Cambodian Americans

This section helps the reader to better understand the issues and challenges facing Cambodian Americans in the US. It explores who they are in the context of history, culture, and ethnicity, and how these factors may explain why a Cambodian family-school partnership may be helpful in the schooling experiences of young people. Specifically, it attempts to paint how challenges at home and school may be directly or

indirectly linked to the challenges of being refugees. Many families were forced to evacuate Cambodia during an intense period of war and genocide only to resettle in urban poverty in the US.

Perhaps to appreciate their challenges, one must understand Cambodia's recent history and its impact on the Cambodian people. Failed US military actions and the blunder of Cold War politics (spilling over from Vietnam into the eastern border of Cambodia) forced countless Cambodians to face a number of challenges, which included loss of personal belonging and family members. Historians argued that the US played a central role in the chaos leading up to the Cambodian genocide. For example, American bombers dropped 540,000 tons of explosives on Cambodian soil, resulting in economic destabilization, the deaths of up to 150,000 people, and the displacement of tens of thousands of others (Hinton, 2002; Kiernan, 1996; Shawcross, 1987, for a complete history of Cambodia, see Chandler, 2000). Perhaps to fully appreciate the magnanimity of the issue, it may be important to note that the US dropped more bombs on the eastern border of Cambodia than on Germany and Japan combined during World War II. Cambodia is roughly the size of Missouri, and had a population of about 8 million people at the beginning of the genocide in 1975.

In April 1975, the Khmer Rouge struck an unthinkable chord when this extreme leftist communist regime invaded Cambodia. Their reign lasted four long years, and saw roughly two million people to their deathbeds, largely resulting from forced labor under extreme conditions in concentration camps. Starvation, malnutrition, and marked execution were contributing factors. Under the Khmer Rouge's control, all institutions were dismantled and destroyed including immediate and extended family units, parent-

child relationships, education systems, religion, and government structures. Anything or anyone remotely resembling and/or influenced by Western ideology had been checked, marked, removed, and executed. Nothing foreign was accepted. Among the victims were intellectuals, Buddhist monks, governmental officials, and students espousing, or seeming to espouse, Western cultural norms, style, and/or ideology.

In 1979, the Vietnamese army liberated Cambodia from the communist Khmer Rouge. Resettlement patterns for Cambodians in the US largely began soon thereafter, and continued into the 1980s. Droves of Cambodian refugees began their flight for freedom, crossing over into Thailand. In response to the "Cambodian refugee crisis," many American families and religious institutions agreed to serve as sponsors often for a period of two years. After that point Cambodian refugees would begin their new lives in the US. Lacking financial and educational resources, many families resettled into poor, blighted urban neighborhoods and communities, living and socializing next to poor blacks and Hispanics/Latinos.

Today, survivors of the genocide face serious mental and physical health challenges, particularly in experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which is a delayed reaction to extreme emotional stress. A majority of Cambodian refugees also reported serious cases of insomnia, breathing problems, loss of appetite, and physical pain. These symptoms often were referred to as the "Pol Pot syndrome" (Bankston, 2009). Therefore, challenges unique to Cambodian refugees in the US might be factored into any discussion which seeks to support these families and children, particularly in the context of family-school partnerships and the schooling experiences of Cambodian students more generally. It may help to paint a clearer picture of the challenges they face,

which may further help school partners to more effectively identify how best to support them. How can schools find ways to respect and draw on a culture when this culture includes deep troubles?

Strengths and Weaknesses of Previous Studies

Some researchers argued in support of family involvement in the form of participating in school-based activities/functions. They often included family-teacher conferences, volunteering, meetings, and Parent Teacher Associations/Organizations (PTA/PTO). However, there is reason to believe that family members with access to certain resources (including speaking English proficiently) are more likely to engage educators and school staff members in the school context (see NCAS, 2000; Pho, 2007, for information on poverty and family involvement, see Hill, 2001). These individuals may feel more confident and comfortable when interacting with school-based individuals.

However, as demonstrated above, some Cambodian family members raising children in the US often do not have a strong command of the English language. Many also lack the capacity to effectively navigate the American public education system (see Aung & Yu, 2007). From that, it appears that family members may be disinclined to participate in school-based functions, given their linguistic and cultural needs. Although some limited English-speaking family members are interested in engaging the school system for assistance (see Okagaki et al., 1995), it is difficult to know whether or how Cambodian family members can access information, in order to better connect with school partners to improve educational outcomes for their children.

Furthermore, some Cambodian families may find their interactive comfort zone at home or in the community (e.g., Moll et al., 1992), and others may believe that the idea of "family involvement" stops at homework patrol and/or teaching children about the important values of education (e.g., Pho, 2007). Some families may also believe that "family involvement" entails instilling a strong work ethic and the values of hard work into their children, which does not necessarily call for parents/guardians to be physically active and/or involved in school-based activities and functions (Lopez, 2001). Also, some Cambodian families may wish to be more involved with school partners but lack the wherewithal to become better connected. There is reason to believe that American educators and schools can learn valuable lessons by listening to the voices of Cambodian families. In listening to their voices, school partners may be better prepared to work with and thus support these families more effectively.

Existing research and literature are limited in this regard. For example, despite the importance Epstein places on the interactive forces of the family, school, and community, her model seems limited in scope. It does not account explicitly for Cambodian-American families, much less immigrant families in general, in creating family-school partnerships. It is difficult to know what immigrant families including Cambodians think about such partnerships or whether they even work, without hearing issues from them directly. For example, one might question the utility of Epstein's six types of parental involvement on non-middle class immigrant or refugee families. To be sure, that model highlights the role of parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community.[1] Each "type" of

[1] For more information, see Epstein, J. L. (2001b). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Boulder, CO: Westview, and Epstein, J. L., & Jansorn, N. R. (2004).

parental involvement is general and, to a large degree, represents the needs and concerns of families who may have greater access to varying resources, financial or otherwise, to help their kids thrive in and out of school.

For example, the "decision making" type recommends observing the following:

> Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy activities through school councils or improvement teams, committees, PTA/PTO, and other parent organizations. Assist family and teacher representatives in obtaining information from and giving information to those they represent (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004, 21; see also Epstein, 2001b).

However, these suggestions assume that family members already have ownership in schools, or they feel comfortable interacting with educators in the school setting. Middle-class families tend to be more involved in the academic affairs of their children, namely when compared to lower income families of color (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hill, 2001). However, this is not always the case for many family members living at or below the poverty line (Hill, 2001), and the case may even be more prominent for Southeast Asian family members not proficient in speaking, reading, and/or writing English (see Aung & Yu, 2007, Kiang, 2004b; Pho, 2007; Thao, 2003). Thus, the language and cultural barriers of immigrant and refugee family members may prevent them from understanding educators and in becoming a part of the school altogether, which appears to be the case with many Cambodian families. The case may be stronger for family members living at or below the federal poverty line. To fill that void, academic research and literature ought to explore the views of Cambodian families, in the context of what can and should be done, in order to build an effective family-school

---

School, Family, and Community Partnerships Link the Plan. *Education Digest*. 69 (6): 19-23.

partnership. That partnership may be able to more effectively support Cambodian students, especially in addressing academic and/or behavioral issues at school.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

This dissertation utilized a qualitative research design. The intention was to use ethnographic interviews as a data collection method. However, I ended up using one round of semi-structured interviews to collect data (for the interview protocol, see Appendix A). There were many reasons why this happened.

First, two months into the data collection process, I moved to Phnom Penh, Cambodia to take on a new job, as Vice President of Strategy, Development, and International Cooperation for The University of Cambodia. Naively thinking I could continue collecting data on the side, from afar via video Skype and email, I ended up working 60-80 hours a week, with a very demanding weekend schedule. The distance and time commitment surely had a negative impact on my ability to collect data, beyond what I was able to collect in the United States prior to moving to Cambodia. That I had run into challenges in getting Cambodian families to participate in the study, while I was still in the US did not help the situation.

Second, two months into my new job, my father passed away unexpectedly. That news tore me to pieces. I struggled for the past four years after his death, mourning his loss, yet persevering to the best of my ability with life and, of course, mustering enough determination and courage to complete the dissertation. With that said, the data I ended up collecting does contribute, albeit very modestly, to extant research and literature on Cambodian-American family-school partnerships. And, in the absence of rich data, there

is learning. There were many learning opportunities from this process, which I believe have helped me to become a more effective researcher; these learning opportunities are fully addressed in Chapter V.

The data were collected from seven family members. Interviews were digitally recorded, and then transcribed into a Word document. The constant comparison approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used to analyze the data, and themes were coded from transcripts. The process of analysis created 66 codes, two themes, and two patterns (for codes, see Appendix B).

After receiving IRB approval, I distributed short background surveys to all 30 members of the Cambodian church (for the survey, see Appendix C). Roughly half of the surveys were completed and returned to me: 7 people said yes; 6 people said no; 17 people never submitted. The survey was intended to collect background information on potential participants. The instrument elicited basic data about church members with respect to level of education, family background, number of children in the family, and their willingness to participate. I also needed information regarding which members were parents or guardians of Cambodian students educated in the United States.

During the review of literature for this study, I found research articles that employed qualitative research methodology in eliciting the views of ethnic minority families in the context of family and school connections. These studies helped to design the research methodology for this dissertation. Thao (2003), for example, conducted a qualitative research study, utilizing ethnographic interviews of families, schools, and students, to examine perceptions of what was needed at home and school to support Hmong students. Sandoval's (2007) unpublished doctoral dissertation also utilized

ethnographic interviewing techniques with Native-American families. To elicit background information, she distributed a short survey to members of the Native-American community, before conducting semi-structured interviews with participants. To analyze data, Sandoval utilized the constant comparison method. Sandoval's work was particularly useful in designing the research methodology for this dissertation.

This dissertation study was inductive. I tried my best to ensure that no pre-existing hypothesis of the family members or their experiences drove the study forward, other than my general knowledge and understanding of the Cambodian people in the United States. The main goal was to listen to their voices, before drawing assumptions or generating theories. I tried my best to guard against researcher bias. To guard against researcher bias, I decided to use descriptive questions. The rationale was to give family members the opportunity to describe their views perhaps in the most explicit, and exhaustive, way possible. As researcher, I stayed close to those descriptions as I interpreted the data. Constant comparison also made sure that themes and relationships derived from the data, and not from previously held assumptions.

Also, I acknowledged certain cultural norms typically representative of the Cambodian people, and made sure that I did my best not to allow those norms to bias my views as researcher. For example, in the Cambodian culture, one does not make eye contact with elders, nor does one delve too deeply into their personal lives. To guard against this cultural bias, I did both during the interview process, though admittedly it made me feel uncomfortable. If not collecting data for this dissertation, I would have avoided acting in this seemingly disrespectful manner.

Methods

Interviews lasted anywhere from 15 to 45 minutes in duration. Initially, I wanted to use Spradley's ethnographic interviewing technique for two reasons. First, I felt comfortable with how he structures questions (i.e., from Grand Tour to Mini-Tour), which made things clearer for me in terms of how questions were layered, from the first to the last question. That is, I would have been afforded the opportunity to start off the conversation talking about their stories of resettlement from Cambodia to the US, while later moving into questions more specifically focused on family-school partnerships and family-involvement in education. According to Spradley (1979), these questions are "intended to encourage an informant to talk about a particular cultural scene [because] one key principle in asking descriptive questions is that *expanding the length of the question tends to expand the length of the response*" (1979, 85, italics kept in original).

Spradley developed a systematic technique for asking descriptive questions. These questions – used to collect data for the purposes of empirical research – are grand tour questions, mini-tour questions, example questions, and experience questions. Grand tour questions and mini-tour questions have a series of more specific questions subsumed under them (see Table 1).

Table 1

Kinds of Descriptive Questions

1. Grand Tour Questions
   - Typical Grand Tour Questions
   - Specific Grand Tour Questions
   - Guided Grand Tour Questions
   - Task-Related Grand Tour Questions
2. Mini-Tour Questions
   - Typical Mini-Tour Questions
   - Specific Mini-Tour Questions
   - Guided Mini-Tour Questions
   - Task-Related Mini-Tour Questions

Source: Adapted from Spradley (1979, 85-89)

In the preface of his book, *The Ethnographic Interview*, Spradley noted that this data collection technique is necessarily amended to the fit and workability of the individual research topic of inquiry.

Interview Questions

To ensure all respondents were asked the same questions, I used an interview protocol (Cohen et al., 2007). Though I reviewed the work of unpublished dissertations on ethnic minority family-school partnerships, I relied mostly on Sandoval's (2007) dissertation to help frame relevant interview questions. That study, similar to my own, was a qualitative research that documented the views of ethnic minority families in the context of family and school connections. Sandoval's ethnographic interviewing technique had questions under categories to include Communication, Parent Participation, Learning Support, Relationships, and Expectations. Personal information was asked towards the end of her interview.

I came up with 10 original interview questions based on their relevance to the two main research questions for this dissertation. The first four interview questions gathered lengthier information about their background. These four interview questions captured families' experiences of war, migration, and life in the US. Interview question five transitioned to a discussion of their views regarding education in general. I wanted them to start thinking about issues related to education, as we moved to more specific questions about family-school partnerships.

Interview question six was relevant to research question one. Research question one asked, "What does family-school partnership mean to Cambodian families?" Given that question, I asked respondents, "When it comes to educating your child, what does family-school partnership mean to you?" I made sure to include the words "family-school partnerships" and "mean" because I wanted respondents to describe what they thought about that partnership. Again, the underlying assumption that drove this study forward was that we cannot know for certain what these partnerships meant to Cambodian adults without first asking their opinion.

Interview questions seven to nine were relevant to research question two. Research question two asked, "What do Cambodian family members say can be done in order to optimize learning for children at school?" Therefore, question seven asked, "What can teachers and families do together to help children at school?" It wanted to know what families and school partners can do together to support young people, before moving into specific questions about what teachers and parents can do alone to support partnerships. As such, question eight asked, "What can teachers do to encourage stronger partnerships with families?" Question nine was, "What can families do to encourage

stronger partnerships with teachers?" In asking questions this way, I wanted to see different views in terms of how partnerships can be developed in a collaborative and/or individual manner. Lastly, question 10 was asked given respondents' affiliation with a church. How, and to what extent, did that affiliation impact their view and involvement regarding family-school partnerships?

Research Setting

I selected a church as the research setting. The Cambodian Church of Texas was the pseudonym created for the actual setting. It was a place of worship for Cambodian-American families who appealed to the Christian faith, and was founded mainly in response to the need for solidarity and comfort after experiencing tremendous loss to one of the worst genocides in human history.

The church was selected for many reasons. First, though most Cambodian families subscribe to Theravada Buddhism, the church was an ideal research setting for me, largely because many Cambodian families congregated there on a regular basis (i.e., every Sunday). Conversely, Cambodian Buddhists tend to visit their respective temples irregularly and only during major holidays/celebrations, usually once or twice every few months. The irregularity of attendance was a huge concern for me, specifically in terms of having the time, space, and opportunity to build trust with respondents.

Another important reason for selecting this setting was based on accessibility to the family members, some of whom welcomed me into their community. The church also was centrally located in an area that was home to a number of Cambodian families. That they were concentrated in one area suggested that they chose to live within close

proximity to those sharing the same ethnic, cultural, and linguistic values (see Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; see also Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). However, being "welcomed" by community members presented both advantages and disadvantages.

Regarding the advantages, some members of the church and I developed a mutually trusting relationship with one another, to the extent that we had lengthy, albeit informal, conversations about various issues, including the educational system in the United States. We also talked about the array of opportunities presented to young people educated through this system, versus those in Cambodia, which is a poverty-stricken developing nation. Regarding the disadvantages, members of the church may have had a certain level of expectation of me, not as a researcher, but as an expert member of their community. That is, they may have expected me to do things that may have jeopardized my role as a researcher whose main goal was to collect and document data about them.

One such incident transpired during the eight months of building relationships. A divorced, female member of the church asked for legal advice regarding a real estate problem she encountered with her former husband. In respecting my role as researcher, without sounding callous or disinterested, I simply advised her to seek the assistance of a legal advisor/attorney, and explained that I was not equipped to handle such matters, because they fell out of my area of expertise. That response, however, may have come with a price: though friendly and talkative at first, I slowly noticed her reticence towards me, and she eventually decided not to participate in the study.

Another reason for selecting this particular setting was its geographic proximity. At the time of data collection, I worked and resided in the same city. Therefore, the location enabled me to interact and work intimately with family members on a regular

basis, especially during my days off over the weekend, leading up to and during the data collection process.

Data Collection

On the day short background surveys were handed out, the pastor gave me a few minutes after his sermon to briefly explain the purpose of the survey, what it asked for, and what to do with the survey once completed. Following IRB recommendations, I handed each member a survey, an envelope (they sealed themselves), and a pen. I also provided a collection box in which surveys were deposited upon leaving the church – a standard shoebox with a lid placed next to the doorway leading patrons out to the driveway and to their cars.

I collected the surveys once everyone left the building. There only were five completed surveys in the shoebox. Many people came back to tell me they wanted to complete the surveys at home, and they needed more time to think things through. Of the five who completed the surveys, three people checked off "Yes" to the question about wanting to participate in the study, while two answered "Maybe, but I need more information." Cambodian family members who answered "Maybe" came back and said they wanted more information. One was a woman, while the other was a man. I said that I would gladly answer any questions they had, and that they could call my number provided on the survey for more information.

In terms of the initial response rate, only 17% of surveys (5 of 30) were completed and returned on the first day surveys were handed out. Over the next few weeks, I continued to talk to various members of the church, explaining my intention to

collect data. Conversations transpired at the church and over the phone. Overall, 13 of 30 church members (who answered “yes” and “no”) completed and returned surveys to me.

Conversations with potential participants took place on Sundays after the sermon, and especially during potlucks. Potlucks were held at the end of the month, which I attended regularly for eight months. Potlucks played an important role for this study. They provided the time and space to have informal discussions with family members. During that time, we also celebrated birthday parties, ate delicious food, and sang songs.

Though I had a small sample size, I decided to leave out two additional respondents. I was concerned that a young man may have answered questions for both guardians, who happened to be his mother and brother. I served as his mentor. Responses were sent to me electronically, and they were far too similar to one another. The “red flag” was that their responses also were consistent with how he spoke and wrote. Working with Latino families, Corona and colleagues (2012) found that children often served as the interpreter for their non-English speaking immigrant parents, in addition to other adults who may not have an adequate command of the English language. These young people were referred to as language brokers, and their English language skills were often better than the adults for whom they interpreted. The young man’s English may have been more proficient than his guardians, and that may have prompted him to answer surveys.

Sampling Procedures

I attempted to use purposive sampling to select informants for the study. In purposive sampling, researchers "handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgment of their typicality or possession of the particular characteristics being sought" (Cohen et al., 2007, 114-115). Initially, I wanted to handpick individuals who agreed to participate, based on different professional and educational backgrounds, while ensuring that both men and women of different ages also participated. These adults also raised children educated in the US. However, in the end, I had to take whomever said yes, with the exception of the two adults where I suspected the child was responding.

All seven adults selected for the study met criteria for selection. There were differences in professional occupation, level of education, gender, and age. All respondents also were parents of at least one child educated in the US. They had different skills and backgrounds, ranging from a community organizer to a photocopy machine repairman to a college professor to a part-time hair dresser. Some informants earned degrees – including one person holding a doctorate – while one did not complete high school. They also ranged in age, with the youngest informant at about the early forties to the oldest in the late seventies. I did not ask about their income level, mainly out of respect, cultural cues for which I took as a Cambodian American familiar with the nuances of this ethnic minority group. I did not interview children, only adults caring for children.

In most instances, participants were typically open to me. We exchanged pleasantries and small talk when I visited the church. Everyone chosen for an interview

was fully aware that I was a Cambodian-American researcher interested in finding educational solutions to help young people, and that I had no desire to join their church. The pastor, who is fluent in both English and Khmer, was my main point of contact.

Analysis

In reviewing literature, I identified which analytical methods were appropriate for this dissertation. I reviewed the work of researchers who conducted qualitative studies on family-school partnerships, family involvement in education, and Southeast Asian-American issues in education. Sandoval's (2007) unpublished dissertation was particularly helpful in selecting the appropriate qualitative methods to analyze data. Similar to Sandoval's study, I decided to use the constant comparison method. The purpose of constant comparison is to jointly code and analyze data in order to generate new theories as they emerge. In allowing themes to emerge, constant comparison served as a strategy to help me guard against researcher bias. Once themes emerged, they were compared across all interviews to check for fit and workability. I continued this process, starting with the first interview and working to the last, going back and forth, until the two themes presented in Chapter IV emerged from the seven interviews.

The Interview Process

I conducted interviews with seven people. With 30 total church members, that was a 23% response rate. The entire interview process lasted about 13 months, from July 2010 to August 2011. The initial interview process lasted from July 2010 to December 2010. Follow-up questions started in January 2011 and lasted until August 2011. I had

to contact some of the participants for clarification regarding their responses, specifically Charles, Steve, and Amy. During the data collection process, much time transpired largely because I wanted to determine whether other Cambodian family members were interested in participating in the study. As I waited, I began the coding process in March 2011.

For each respondent, I opened the interview with some background questions. This was helpful in terms of introducing me to who these family members were as individuals. Then, I moved into a set of "Grand Tour Questions" focused more broadly on their view of education, and then we moved into more specific "Mini-Tour Questions" that were focused on their views and experiences with school partners. Again, the intention behind the descriptive questions was to capture the voices of Cambodian participants regarding the topic of inquiry. Also, I asked all seven participants to sign the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix D), and I also signed the form, agreeing to respect their privacy by identifying them with a pseudonym. All seven interviews were conducted in English.

I began the interview process with the pastor, given his leadership role in the church and knowledge of key issues pertaining to Cambodian-American families. He appeared to know so much about the Cambodian community. He was also respected as a community leader. His breath and depth of knowledge of the local community helped to paint the "bigger picture" of the multitude of factors confronted by Cambodians. That picture refers to the everyday stories of the people. While he could not paint every single picture, he painted enough to help me establish some legitimate context within which issues raised by other informants could be situated. Once his interview had been

completed, I interviewed David, Paula, Larry, Sarah, Amy, and finally Charles. The selection of interviews following Steve's interview was based on the informant's availability. David's and Amy's interviews took place at church, after the pastor's Sunday sermon. The interview with Steve was at his office; Paula's interview took place over dinner at my house; Larry's and Sarah's interviews were at a Vietnamese restaurant. Charles' first and follow-up interviews happened over email. All transcripts can be found in Appendix E.

Challenges in Finding People to Participate

I want to say a few words about the difficulties encountered in finding respondents for the study, despite appealing to my general knowledge about the Cambodian people and consulting with respected Cambodian elders. Though I am cognizant that my own actions may have led to these challenges, other factors may have contributed as well, and both are explored.

Perhaps I should have approached families before church, as opposed to asking them after church. Families may have been ready to go home after a long sermon. Maybe asking them before sermon, they would have been less anxious to leave. But that does not explain those families who eventually turned down the opportunity to participate when asked during potlucks. One would think that families would be more relaxed during potluck gatherings, as they enjoyed their time together over a good meal and conversation. Or, perhaps I should have asked for their phone numbers and arranged a meeting outside of church to discuss their interest in participating in the study. That may have given us more privacy, not to mention a quiet place with fewer disruptions.

I also may have wrongly assumed that they were even the least bit interested in discussing with me, of all things, about family-school partnerships. Perhaps it was not my place to ask them about anything remotely related to their family, children, or children's educational experience. Who was I to come in, as a researcher, and assume that they would even have an hour or more of their time to give me, to discuss an issue that may not have been that important to them? Who was I to assume that they even needed voice and agency? And if they wanted voice and agency, who was I to assume that I could give it to them, as a researcher no less? These parents may have felt perfectly content with the status quo, or with how families and schools currently interacted.

What this tells me, now, is that researchers cannot simply "give" respondents voice. Rather, voice must come naturally and from a place of intentionality and purpose. That is, their voice needs to come from within, and it should emerge from an authentic place where they feel most comfortable sharing. Perhaps informal conversations are that place of comfort. These families may not have been interested in sharing their views more formally with researchers and particularly for the whole world to hear. To them, maybe those small, informal conversations after church, for example, are more than sufficient, and through such informalities they feel most comfortable talking and sharing. Thus, researchers cannot simply "give" voice to these families, especially by way of a dissertation, which in itself can be an odd, complex, and rigid process.

It also tells me that, for those parents who may want voice and agency, perhaps a great deal more trust-building is required. And though I spent eight months interacting with them at church, perhaps that time was insufficient. Maybe they needed to see me more frequently, invested in their communities outside of the church, and for longer

periods of time. Maybe they needed me to be a member of their church, or perhaps to embrace the Christian faith. In knowing that my family and I were practicing Buddhists, actively involved in the Buddhist temple, perhaps they were turned off by me completely for religious reasons. Perhaps they simply did not trust, or to put it bluntly, like me for these and other reasons.

Another reason why they may have decided not to participate in the study was that I may have sent mixed signals about my role in the community and my then role as a staff member in the mayor's office. Perhaps some people saw me as a member of the community, and therefore felt as though they had sufficiently shared information with me "offline" while having informal conversations during potlucks and after church. Others may have been turned off by the fact that I was a government employee, and in knowing that, perhaps they no longer saw me as a community member. These family members may have encountered challenges with the government in the past, and perhaps my role in the mayor's office turned them off because it may have conjured up old, bad memories.

Yet another reason may have been fear of exposing private information to the public. Based on my admittedly limited views of having previously interacted with Cambodian families – limited because they are based on my individual experiences – going into this process, I was concerned that some Cambodian families would not want to participate in formal interviews, for reasons to include a general fear of exposing private information about their personal lives. But I did not want fear to deter me from pursuing this important research study. Again, that was based on my limited views, and it is an observation I have made over many years, as a member of the Cambodian community

and, perhaps more importantly, as the son of parents who have spent countless hours volunteering their time to aid Cambodian refugees in the US. While my dad worked a blue-collar job full-time to pay the bills, my mother, in particular, volunteered countless hours of her time, over two decades, assisting Cambodian refugees in attaining public assistance to include food stamps and public housing. Using her own car, paying for her own gas, and buying food to eat for herself and for those refugees she was helping at the time. I was able to observe these stories in person, when I went along for the ride over the summer, spending long days accompanying my mother.

As I began the process of identifying people to participate in the study, I slowly realized that some Cambodian family members were not interested, despite knowing who I was, or knowing my family – albeit, on an informal basis – and after spending eight months trying to build trust in a place that was familiar to them (i.e., the church). I was especially surprised when those families, who spoke freely and openly with me during informal discussions at the church, had decided not to participate. I thought I had chosen a relatively "safe" topic to discuss, about which something most – if not all – parents would often feel comfortable addressing. But apparently I was wrong about many things. And I recognize that my own actions may have caused families not to participate, in addition to factors that may have been beyond my control.

There might also have been different ways of arranging interviews. Maybe I should not have conducted David's and Amy's interviews at church. Perhaps they were tired and hungry, especially in being interviewed right after a long sermon. Perhaps I should have interviewed Sarah and Larry on different days. Sarah, in particular, may have been more inclined to share more information with me without her husband present.

Maybe interview responses would have been longer for Sarah, if she were not distracted by her children during the interview. Maybe she would have been more comfortable speaking longer, if she had been interviewed before her husband, Larry. Perhaps I should have found a more private and quiet location – than the loud, busy Vietnamese restaurant – when I interviewed Sarah and Larry.

Coding

I worked alone in the coding process and did not have anyone else coding the data. I conducted two rigorous rounds of coding. For round one, NVivo was used to organize information and analyze data. Round one yielded 27 codes that were extremely broad. However, a deep(er) analysis of the data was reached in round two. To avoid being overly categorical in round two, I decided to code using cogent phrases, which captured the essence of what was discussed. That, I believe, avoided clichés and created detailed codes. NVivo was abandoned for the second round, in part because the license had expired. Instead, Word documents were used for coding and analysis. While NVivo software was abandoned, I still was able to work with documents previously imported from NVivo, during round one coding. I compared codes from round two with those from round one several times.

Round One Coding

In terms of the process for round one, I spent a month combing through all interviews. I came up with 27 codes based on common, repetitive ideas that emerged from the data. I wanted to code anything that "popped out." In coding data, I asked questions like, "What is the respondent really saying about an issue," and "How is that

the same or different from other respondents?" Also, I asked, "Are they saying the same things," and "If so, what is different about it?" Going from one transcript to the next a few times identified the 27 codes for round one.

Round one coding helped to break down large blocks of complex information into clear categories; categories created structure around responses. I was then able to visualize consistent patterns in responses. That was even more helpful in round two, particularly as I further analyzed data. Round one also helped separate out personal background information.

Round Two Coding

For round two coding, I paid close attention to specific codes from round one: Family, Culture, Community, Guidance, Talk, Learning, Partnership, PTA, and School. They spoke more directly to the two research questions. During the second round coding process, I used a yellow highlighter to identify responses related to the first research question and pink for the second research question.

The first research question focused on "descriptions" of their beliefs of what family-school partnerships meant. Interview question six was therefore coded using a yellow highlighter. For research question two, I focused on their beliefs expressed in terms of "action taking," and responses to interview questions seven, eight, and nine were highlighted in pink. I then went on to questions 1 to 5 and 10 to determine which data could be highlighted in yellow or pink. I wanted to see if they commented elsewhere to the two research questions.

Once data were highlighted on the hard copy, I created a soft copy in Word format, "pulling out" parts of the transcript that had been highlighted in either yellow or

pink. Then, using that Word document, I created a table of three columns: 1) Person; 2) Interview Questions; and 3) Codes. Once cells were filled with the appropriate information, pulled from all seven transcripts, I read through the data a few more times.

I was able to identify 66 codes that spoke more directly to the research questions. Again, the first 27 codes were extremely broad and categorical; on the other hand, the 66 codes broke down the data even further into cogent phrases. In order to code beyond the yellow and pink highlights, I asked questions like, "How, and to what extent, does the code relate to family-school partnerships?" In doing that, I was able to remove codes that did not speak to family-school partnerships. Specifically, that additional level of coding enabled me to remove codes regarding the church, which were more broadly related to the intersection of church and education.

Differences between Themes and Patterns

Themes and patterns emerged from the coding process. Themes represented the voices of all seven participants for the study – these were commonalities distributed across all interviews. On the other hand, patterns represented the voices of at least three participants. Patterns were subsumed under specific themes.

The process of going back and forth between codes and data was really useful in allowing two themes to emerge. Going back and forth, from themes to patterns and back to the codes, I compared and contrasted these words carefully, making sure that the final two themes were representative of the patterns, codes, and ultimately the responses shared.

External Validity

This was a small qualitative study with a sample size of seven. Therefore, generalizability was not possible. However, while findings were not generalizable, they have meaning for more than the study participants. In particular, doctoral students and researchers interested in learning about the views of Cambodian-American families, particularly with respect to family-school partnerships and/or family involvement in education may find this research useful. They may use this study to better understand whether or not these families view such partnerships similarly or differently from other families, and if so, to what extent are those similarities and differences. They may also seek to better understand how Cambodian Americans view culture, for example, in building effective partnerships with school partners.

Trustworthiness of Data and Findings

How did I ensure trustworthiness of data and findings? I decided to use member checking. I conducted member checking to ensure accuracy and completeness of transcripts and the interpretation of data. I sent each respondent three items: 1) a copy of their transcripts; 2) findings from the study; and 3) a short description about each person.

Regarding feedback on the interpretation of the data: Under the appropriate pseudonym, I asked each person to read through the findings to provide an opportunity to critically analyze the findings and provide feedback, wherever necessary. The intention was to allow each person to affirm the accuracy and completeness of their views and experiences, and that the interpretation of the data was correct. The findings had to be

authentic and original, and the process of validating respondent feedback was a crucial step in that process. One person requested changes to specific information: David corrected “full technology engineer” to “food technology engineer,” but there were no recommended changes to the interpretation of their data. At the time of writing this section, and conducting member check, I discovered the unfortunate news that Larry passed away suddenly from an aneurism. Therefore, member checking was done with everyone except for Larry. He left behind his wife “Sarah,” young son, and adolescent step-daughter.

Chapter IV

RESULTS

I organized my findings based on the two most prevalent themes emerging from the seven interviews. I decided to utilize semi-structured interviews because they allowed me to have structured conversations with informants, while being able to ask follow-up questions to gain clarification to their responses. Before presenting the interview findings, however, I share information regarding a description of interviewees, the interview process, and challenges in finding people to participate in the study.

Description of Interviewees

I interviewed seven adults for this study: Steve; David; Paula; Larry; Sarah; Amy; and Charles. Four men and three women participated. Six adults were Cambodian-American and one adult was a Mexican-American man married to a Cambodian-American woman. The Mexican-American gentleman, Larry, was married to Sarah. I decided to keep his interview because he was helping to raise Cambodian children with his wife. He accepted important cultural aspects of being "Cambodian," including using the Khmer language at home (in addition to English and Spanish). He raised children with traditional Cambodian cultural values and norms, as indicated in his interview. In addition, Larry approached me with a particular interest in participating in the study, and I wanted to give him the opportunity to share his views. Though Larry and Sarah were raising the same children, I decided to include Sarah as a distinct respondent because, as

an individual, she was more than just Larry's wife. She was her own person, and her voice also deserved to be heard. Also, I included her interview because she may have a different view from Larry, in terms of what family-school partnerships mean, in addition to what could be done to support her children at school.

Of the four men and three women, six were married and one female was a single divorcee. Two interviewees earned a high school diploma in Cambodia; one earned a Bachelor's degree in Cambodia; one earned a high school diploma in the US; one earned an Associate's degree in the US; one earned a Ph.D. in the US; and one was a high school dropout from an American school. All seven adults were guardians of at least one Cambodian child who is or was educated in an American school system. The descriptions of all interviewees are provided below.

Lastly, most participants were reserved in how they responded to questions, despite asking follow-up questions for clarity and using prompts to elicit "more meaningful" responses. Of course, their reservation may have resulted from how questions were asked. Paula and Amy were the most descriptive in their responses – based on the length of their respective interviews. Steve, David, and Larry provided responses often without specific examples, even though follow-up questions were asked for depth and clarity. Still, despite such vagueness, Steve in particular provided useful information regarding the broader issues affecting Cambodians, and was able to connect the dots in terms of how community partners should be better leveraged to connect families and schools. Thus, Steve and David were more likely to provide examples of other families and stories they heard within the community, as opposed to specific anecdotes of their own families. That may, in large part, be a result of wanting to

maintain their privacy, and where stories were not in favor of making their children or family appear wholesome or good, there was reason to believe that they may have left stories out entirely – to save face, which is an integral part of the Cambodian, if not larger Asian culture.

Table 2 presents information regarding each respondent and their children.

Table 2

Description of Interviewees

Respondent Name	Length of Interview	Respondent Age	Respondent Ethnicity	Age of Children	Dates Children Attended K-12 Schools
Steve	28 minutes	Late 50s	Cambodian	Daughter-26 Son-25 Son-19	1989-2002 1990-2003 1996-2009
David	26 minutes	Late 50s	Cambodian	Daughter-28 Daughter-24 Daughter-19	1987-2000 1991-2004 1996-2009
Paula	45 minutes	Late 70s	Cambodian	Daughter-35	1980-1993
Larry	15 minutes	Mid 40s	Mexican	Step-daughter-14 Son-7	2001-Present 2008-Present
Sarah	13 minutes	Early 40s	Cambodian	Daugher-14 Son-7	2001-Present 2008-Present
Amy	44 minutes	Early 40s	Cambodian	Daugher-15 Son-13	2000-2013 2002-Present
Charles	Email	Early 50s	Cambodian	Son-29 Son-26	1987-2000 1989-2002

Steve

"Steve" is a Cambodian-American man in his late 50s. He is a quiet but thoughtful man who weighs his words carefully as he speaks. He is married and is the father of three children, all educated in American schools. His first child is a daughter in her mid-twenties. His second and third children are boys, with the first in his mid-twenties and second late teens. Steve and his wife were educated in Cambodia. Steve earned a high school diploma from Cambodia, completed his General Educational Development (GED) as soon as he arrived in the US, and has taken some courses at the college level, but does not hold a post-secondary or post-graduate degree.

Steve has lived in the United States for roughly 30 years, immigrating to the US from Thailand in 1981. During his time in Thailand, he lived in a refugee camp along the Thai-Cambodian border for two years, which was also where he became proficient in English and was introduced to Christianity. Before Thailand, Steve was forced to work in a concentration camp in one of the rural villages of the country, under the commands of the Khmer Rouge. From Thailand, Steve was sent to an island in Indonesia where he lived for a few months, before finally moving to the US. He made his way to Texas and has lived in that city ever since.

Similar to many Cambodian refugees in the US, Steve is a victim of the Cambodian genocide. The passage below explains how life was difficult after the genocide, as he left Cambodia to start a new life:

> [It was] very difficult you know by the time back in 1981 it was not easy life. You know the first come to the new country like this we have nothing…even myself, I only have one pant and one shirt with me, with no extra clothes. It was hard so we depend on the government [to help] us just for a while and then I start to work right away.

Today, Steve works as a community organizer in a non-governmental organization that serves immigrants and refugees. He has worked at this organization for over two decades. He spends much of his time helping newly arrived refugees and immigrants, largely from war-torn and/or poverty-stricken countries. He also is a pastor of the church.

Steve also talks about his family's struggles in settling into the United States in 1981, and the challenges of the American and Cambodian cultures. In referring to both cultures, he says, "[L]earning and growing is…not easy in [the US], especially if you're from the other country and then the language is different, the culture is different and everything different so we try to adapt ourselves." Steve not only talks about the challenges of having to assimilate into an entirely different world, but doing it quickly so that his family, especially his children can "adjust our lives to be…more comfortable to both sides [the US and Cambodia]." Steve talks about his children in particular, how "it's not easy for them to be 100% in Cambodian or 100% in American," but in the process of learning both cultures, Steve's family is appreciative of the opportunity to start a new life, and to have the good fortune to escape the brutality of the genocide in Cambodia.

David

"David" is a Cambodian-American man in his late 50s. He holds a college degree, which he earned in Cambodia. Today, in the US, David is a blue-collar worker. He, too, was in a refugee camp along the Thai-Cambodia border. He shares his story of struggle and survival:

> I walked from [the] Cambodian border north…to Thailand. I paid somebody to bring me. I cut across the border in the middle of the night. We walked through the jungle and they left us down there. I stayed with a Thai family for a week and then I settled in a refugee camp. And then the Thai government [drove] us back to Cambodia loaded us back into the bus and pushed us to get out and left us in a dangerous place in "Deng Reich" mountain, on the border of Thailand, to walk back to Cambodia. During that time I need to walk through the mine land looking for the water [to drink]. A lot of people killed in front of me. I prayed to God to save my life. It took me one whole month to walk day and sometimes night 500 miles, looking for something to eat, as much as I can. Trading something precious so that I can have some food and coming looking for my parents and walking 500 miles taking one month and finally I reaching my parents and then I take my second chance to come back to the border working with United Nations with American doctor. And finally I put my application and coming to America and I came to America in 1981.

David is married with three daughters, all educated in American schools. One daughter is in her late twenties; one in her mid-twenties; and the youngest daughter in her early twenties. Despite David's previous hardship, he remains optimistic and full of energy in his pursuit of life. Saying things like, "I think this is the best country and a blessing country in the whole world," is but a small indication of how grateful he is regarding the opportunities afforded to his family in the United States. David also reflects on how he and his children have accepted the mainstream American culture. To this point, he notes, "I'm living in America and I've adopted the American culture. My children, too, they live over here. I try not to force them to go back to the Cambodian culture, but I just teach them about right and wrong and to be polite." David encourages his children to socialize and blend in to mainstream America, and places more weight on teaching his children to be good people, versus the importance of embracing one culture over the other.

With great pride, David shares how hard his family has worked in order to have the opportunities they have today – and much of that has to do with the fact that his "family appreciate[s] education very much" where he and his wife has pushed their three daughters to understand the importance of a college education. Talking about his children, and how hard they have worked, David notes, "[M]y children working and going to school [at the same time] it's kind of a little bit hard for them." This father of three is cognizant of what he was able to provide for his children, and the possible consequences of not being able to provide more when they were in school. David explains, "[A]ll I can provide is transportation and a place for them to stay. To pay for the tuition, the book and everything is kind of hard. They drop their grade down when they got to work full time and go to school full time." What David was able to provide is perhaps more than what any of his children could have asked for, given their humble background.

However, David is not shy about recognizing his children's successes. He notes gleefully, "The oldest [daughter] get a bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice in Boston, Massachusetts, and the second [daughter] graduated from the University of Houston in Communication, and the last [daughter] still at school at [the University of Texas]." Witnessing his children accomplish so much academically seems to have justified the horrors of the genocide, and how painfully difficult his life had been during that time.

Paula

"Paula" is a Cambodian-American woman with one daughter. Her daughter was educated in American schools. Paula holds a doctorate of philosophy (Ph.D.), which she earned in the United States, and is a science instructor at a community college located

near a large university. She is a divorcee in her late 70s. She refers to her daughter as "a good all American girl." One of the proudest moments in her life was choosing to leave her husband, though she was well aware of the difficulties ahead. In sharing this with us, Paula notes, "When we divorced…[this] is one of the few decisions I did right, when it came to my daughter. I want my daughter to have a high degree and the only way [was to live next to] a university." Not only does Paula value education, for herself and her daughter, she believes that it saved her life. She explains, "I could divorce my husband. Actually, I ran away because he said, 'If you leave me I will kill you.' So, I have to tell you that I ran away. I could do this, because I have education. If I don't have education, he could beat me up twice every day, and I would still be there." We can see that Paula is outspoken and independent, and is fearless in her responses, as she is about life.

Paula does not claim to be a political refugee. She left Cambodia for Australia in 1972, to pursue her academic career, where she stayed for three months to receive training in her field. During that time, Paula applied and was accepted into a master's degree program at an American university. She completed her degree, and was accepted into a Ph.D. program at another American institution.

Paula also has military service experience in Cambodia. She collected intelligence for the US-backed Lon Nol army, working with the US Embassy. Paula credits her progressive frame of mind and outspokenness to her mother, a woman who was not educated but fearless in her pursuit for equality in the home and society.

As candid as she is fiery, Paula talks about her struggles as a single mother. She instilled strong values and was actively involved in her daughter's life, despite a noticeable hardship. She explains, "I was divorced when she was 6, so I was a single

parent…I'm the kind of mother who would sit down, take her homework and look at her homework." She is proud to be among a small group of highly educated women in the Cambodian community – particularly at a time when women were not afforded equal opportunity to go to school, in the US and Cambodia. But Paula not only went to school, she earned a doctorate in science. To that point, Paula notes, "I'm probably the only one [who could review homework], it doesn't happen in this country, but it happens at home a lot." Paula also found unconventional ways for her daughter to continue learning at home. For example, she notes, "[W]hen we eat dinner I would ask her, 'What's 7 times 9?' She can't answer that then no TV tonight." Paula encouraged her daughter to study hard, noting that her small salary and the fact she had no spouse to contribute made things difficult for them. Paula explains, "I put pressure on her to study. Because we'd talk and I'd say, 'You and I, that's it. My salary is so low, so if you want to go to college, you get a scholarship. That's your aid. If you don't get [a scholarship] there's no way Mom, with eighteen thousand dollars a year…can pay for [school].'" Her daughter completed college and graduated with a master's degree in business from a top school in Texas.

Larry

"Larry" is a Mexican-American man in his mid-forties married to a Cambodian-American woman. His wife has a full-blooded Cambodian-American teenage daughter from a previous marriage. Together, Larry and his wife have one child, and both the son and step-daughter speak Khmer/Cambodian at home, "because Momma she speaks to them in Cambodian all the time… [and] in the house, they are more into the Cambodian culture." He adds, "The food and how they live," are some of the things that help his

children embrace the Khmer culture. In talking about the similarities between the Cambodian and Hispanic cultures, Larry points out, "Cambodians and Hispanics, culture is almost the same…Relationship with the kids and the families, almost the same. You don't let your kids go out, play with other kids all the time. Stay away from the house. Families be together all the time." His relatively conservative views of the larger mainstream American culture are less optimistic, noting "It's different because in the American culture, they let the kids go out by themselves. Oh he's 14, she's 15, they can go out with their friends." His experiences, I thought, would add an interesting perspective to this study.

Larry is a quiet but thoughtful man who responded with short sentences. He was educated mostly in Mexico but continued school in the US where he ended up dropping out of high school after two years. He is a blue-collar worker who fixes appliances for a company with franchises nationwide. He appears to be a man with discipline and a solid work ethic, which he attributes to his upbringing. He attributes his work ethic to what he has "learned on the streets," because his "experience is working and that's it." He also attributes his respect for people in general to his father and grandfather. Laughing, he contrasts his difficult upbringing to his children's lives in the US, which he says, "They grew up here so everything is easier for them unlike us," and there is a level of pragmatism when he talks about how schools prepare his children for the real world. Larry explains, "For life, no good…real life is harder. You've got to be tougher than that, not so easy like that."

Sarah

"Sarah" is a Cambodian-American woman in her early forties. She immigrated to the US, from Cambodia, in the early 1990s. She is married to Larry, and has one son with him who is in elementary school and another daughter in high school from a previous marriage. She is a stay-at-home mom and part-time hair stylist. She graduated from high school in Cambodia. She is a quiet woman who also responded with short sentences.

She believes in the importance of preserving the Cambodian culture through language, because "we are Cambodian [and] our language is very important, but the kids here they don't really like to talk to us in Cambodian." Of all respondents, Sarah has been in the US the shortest amount of time. She recognizes that the US provides her children with "more opportunity to do whatever they want in this country" and, in a simple way, she reminds us that "with [an] education, you have more opportunity." Sarah volunteers every Tuesday on her days off to eat lunch with her son to "show love" and that "mommy cares." She is also very interested in being a teacher's aide, noting "I'd like to help the teacher, no matter what…cleaning and stuff like that." Though admittedly limited in what she can do, she tells us that "I like to help."

Sarah's story was short. This may have resulted from the possibility that she was a "junior" partner to Larry. Perhaps Sarah relied significantly on Larry to raise their two children, which may have included relying on Larry to discipline the children and to interact with school partners. It is curious that she did not share information on how to discipline her son, whom Larry did mention gets into quite a bit of trouble at school. It is

also curious that Larry spoke directly about his interactions with teachers at school, while Sarah did not mention very much about her interactions with teachers. What this might suggest is that perhaps Sarah nurtures the children, while Larry is the disciplinarian.

Amy

"Amy" is a Cambodian-American woman in her early forties. She is a stay-at-home mom and also a part-time hair stylist. Amy completed high school and three years of college in the US. She never graduated from college, though she has aspirations of doing so one day. Amy immigrated to the US from Cambodia in 1980, when she was about 10, and her family received help from the church community. She shares her story of resettlement:

> [We] came to the United States in 1980. We came out of a country that was damaged, poor. We left the country with nothing in our pockets. So when we came to the new land, to the United States, all my parents did was work, work, work, and provide for the family. They have four children. And during that time, my dad was a teacher, when he came here, my dad was a teacher in Cambodia. My mom just stayed home and [took] care of us. So when he came here, he worked at Taco Bell, and during that time, the minimum wage [was] $3.25, I think, in 1980. It's not much. And my mom got paid around there too. So, we were very thrifty. My mom and dad were very thrifty, and they managed to save up and bought a house by 1986 and bought a car two years after we came, a Pontiac station wagon. They provided for us, put food on the table, shelter and clothing

Amy also had to work "odd jobs" in the service industry. She explains, "When I was in high school I worked [at] Target, Walmart [and]…Burger King when I was in college." She moved to Louisiana the year she was married because her husband started a new job there. And though she attended college in Louisiana, she was never able to complete school and has "some regrets not finishing school." However, she is proud of

having the opportunity to raise her children, noting "teaching them the values and all that I think I succeeded."

Amy is married to a Cambodian-American man who is an engineer in the oil industry, and together they have two children in their teens. Both children were educated in American schools. Their marriage was somewhat pre-arranged: both sets of parents made the arrangement, but ultimately she and her husband made the final decision to marry one another. She considers herself to be culturally "half [Cambodian] and half [American]." She entered the pre-arranged marriage, in large part because this is what her parents had wanted and listening to her parents was "how I was raised." However, she does say that she wants differently for her children, particularly "I don't think I'm going to do what my parents did to me, you know, arranged [marriage], because they were born [in the US]. They grew up here, so they're American." She shares that her children have absolutely no interest in learning the Khmer culture and the fact that they do not speak Khmer at home is "shameful." She reminds her children despite their resistance, "You're a Cambodian-American…You come from me, you are Cambodian, and that it's important to know where you come from." Amy believes that the biggest difference between the Cambodian and American culture is that young people in Cambodia respect their elders, noting in Khmer "*Kay karop chas chas*" (literally translated, "they respect their elders"). She does not believe that American children work "hard enough for what they have." And though her marriage was pre-arranged, Amy does note that she and her husband are kindred spirits, and she feels blessed that her marriage has worked out.

Amy shares an interesting story about the first time she visited Cambodia after the genocide, noting "While I was there I had a bad experience. I wasn't used to the pot holes [and] just the environment [and] seeing poor people, the [decrepit] houses." That was more than enough for her. She adds, "When I came back to the United States, I was so glad to step off the airplane and driving on the street with no pot holes…This is home I wouldn't go back to live in Cambodia."

When she started school in the US, she was really shy and did not speak English. Amy recalls being teased because of it, which made her feel bad. She also recalls how she could not go to her parents about being teased, perhaps because they had more difficult things to deal with, like putting food on the table. But it was also cultural, because "the upbringing of being Cambodian during that time when I was little…something like that you look at it as not as important…so you don't go to Mom and Dad for it." She felt that she could "deal with it on [her] own" because the issue would not last forever. Though she could not go to her parents about being teased, Amy has made it a point to teach her own kids about not teasing and bullying others, and based on her explanation, this is something she takes very seriously.

Charles

"Charles" is a Cambodian-American man in his early 50s. He arrived to the US from Cambodia in the late 1980s. He was educated in Cambodia. After years of hard work in the US, Charles finally earned an Associates (AA) degree. He remarks on his experience of survival:

> During the first one year living in the US, it was so shock for me because of the new culture and environment plus foods have made me homesick. We worked every day to adopt and change to the

> new culture and environment around us. A couple years later, life seemed to be settled down. We started to see things positively and enjoy the prosperities and have a peaceful mind that this country has offered. We work hard every day to support our family and learned how to save some money for our future…To my experience, living in the US is quite a challenge.

Charles is married with two boys: 29 and 26. Both children graduated from an American high school. Charles appears to be a cautiously optimistic man who sees the world half-glass full. Through his personal narrative, one can feel a sense of pride in his accomplishments, but also some reservations about the challenges of living in the US.

Charles was definitely more philosophical in his responses to me, particularly compared to other respondents. For example, in asking about his views of education, he responded, "Education, to me, means 'Enlighten' which is the key to success in life. Successful in life mean to better understand not just something around ourselves, but oversee the whole world in which we are living in." Despite his philosophical views, and though he was less descriptive in his responses, Charles does speak quite a bit about the importance of schools in terms of helping young people to "build character" by becoming a "productive citizen." Thus, the role of schools is not only to educate young people but to help instill within them important life lessons, so they can contribute back to society. And Charles reminds us that building character "is the most important part that the US school system needs today."

While many factors created challenges, seven adults participated in the study. I want to focus on the information they shared. The section below explores findings from their interviews.

1. What Does Family-School Partnership Mean to Cambodian Families?

The first research question attempted to capture families' beliefs and perceptions of how Cambodian families get involved (or should get involved) in their children's education. This research question was asked in order to better understand what family-school partnerships meant to them. There were two main themes. The first theme focused on the role of communication in terms of "what" family-school partnerships meant to families, especially in addressing a problem and cultural understanding. The second theme focused on the "how" teachers and families can work together in order to support learning for children.

Building Family-School Partnerships through Communication

The first theme was, *Building Family-School Partnerships through Communication*. That theme referred to both families and school partners communicating pertinent information to one another. Respondents defined communication in two ways. One way to communicate was to share information about the child's progress, especially timely information for interventions. The other communication was cultural understanding, which was on a more personal level. Thus, the first pattern under this theme, "Contacting Parents about Problems," was about the child's progress. The second pattern, "Learning Culture between Families and Teachers," was about cultural understanding.

In terms of building family-school partnerships through communication, all seven respondents appeared to support the notion that communication between teachers and families was important.

To respondents, family-school partnerships meant that families and teachers had to communicate with each other and work together, and one way to do that was to share information about how their children were doing at school. In communicating with each other, parents were expected to know what teachers were teaching and support teachers in any way possible.

For example, Steve noted, "Relationship is very important for the parent and the school…anything the teacher want to know about our children, then we can tell them." Steve also suggested that the place to have this conversation was at school, where parents and teachers can have an open dialogue. He went on to note, "[At] school they always have teacher and parents meet…and that's the partnership….we can know what the teacher is teaching our children and what we can [do to] help them." Paula also believed that parents and teachers should communicate at school, because "that's the time when your children are not there. Adults [are] talking." That appeared to suggest that parents and teachers can have more time to discuss issues, both good and bad, without children present. If children were present, Paula may be suggesting that parents and teachers may not speak candidly, and that could be a challenge in itself because it may prevent adults from identifying challenges that may hinder children, at home or at school.

Amy also believed that family-school partnerships meant that parents and teachers talk to each other at school about the progress of their children. She was more specific about suggesting that there were a variety of ways for parents to get involved in school-

related matters. Amy noted, "Get involved with your school. Go to PTA meetings. Talk to the counselors. Talk to the teachers...just get to know the teacher, what they teaching at school, so when they come home, you have an idea of what they're learning at school." Amy believed that parents ought to talk to teachers directly in order to have a better understanding of what their children were learning. This may have been important, because it better enabled her to know, for example, whether or not her children were staying ahead or falling behind academically and/or behaviorally.

David also spoke to the importance of having an open channel of communication between families and teachers. That partnership meant that teachers ought to use different ways to share information with him, especially if teachers witnessed his children struggling at school. He noted, "[If] my children have a problem at school, I think that is a good communication. [Teachers] call me, they send a letter, they do something to help our children, to let me know as a father, as a parent." However, as a parent, David also spoke to the importance of regularly checking in with his children. Thus, family-school partnerships meant being vigilant as a parent, checking in with his children but also talking with teachers, in the event his children were having any sort of issues at school. "[As] long as I talk to my children, 'How is school going and everything,' and if they say that everything is okay, and I check the grade point average and the grade each semester...that is good, then I think the teacher is doing a very good job," he noted.

Similar to most parents, David may have used grades and grade point averages as indicators of his children's academic success, because they let him know, as a parent, whether or not his children were falling behind or advancing forward. If they were falling behind, then the teacher may have a better understanding of why they were

struggling. Thus, family-school partnerships meant that he, as a parent, communicated with his children's teachers to make sure that none of his children were failing classes. And, if they were failing, it appeared that David would have engaged teachers at that point to take corrective action, bringing his children back up to par academically.

For Paula, having an open channel of communication between families and teachers was particularly important, given how she was a single mother working many long hours. In essence, family-school partnerships meant that teachers were an "extra pair of eyes" for busy, single parents. Teachers could monitor her daughter's academic progress and behavior. She stated,

> [When] you work two jobs, you don't have time to put your eyes on your daughter…Whatever she did in school I would know because the teacher would tell me… How does my daughter behave in school? Was she a happy child, is she happy? If looks like she's in trouble every day, then I know there's something, besides the B or C or grades. Something that I would not know, because I don't see how she behaves at school she could be happy child at home but when she goes to school she always has trouble. So, I know that she has social problems. Teachers can [help with] that.

Paula may have relied on teachers as an effective partner because she wanted her daughter to know that though she was a busy working parent, there was another adult at school who was there to support, if not check, on her. This suggested that teachers shared the responsibility of helping busy parents like Paula to make sure that children were doing well at school, and perhaps the most effective way of making that happen was to keep an open channel of communication between her, as a parent, and her child's teachers at school. In doing this, Paula noted, "[T]he children think…'I better not do bad in school because she is going to hear about it.'"

Though Larry also believed that family-school partnerships meant talking to teachers about his children, he was more direct about what teachers can do. Larry noted, “[If] I go to school and ask how my kids are doing, I want a straight answer. I want them to tell me how I can help my kid to improve or what he needs to be done for him to improve something.” What this appeared to suggest was that Larry was open to speaking with teachers about his child’s progress at school, specifically when his son got into trouble. But in that conversation, it would help Larry if he knew exactly what he needed to do in order to ensure that his child made improvements in those areas. That could mean telling Larry about where his son was struggling academically and/or behaviorally, thus focusing on very specific challenges. Or, perhaps that could mean providing more general recommendations about what his son should or should not do at home, which may include reading more books to stimulate the brain or avoid watching too much television.

Sarah also viewed family-school partnerships as an opportunity for families and teachers to talk with each other. She stated, “It’s good if you have time with the teacher, to talk to them, get to know the teacher so the teacher can help…tell you about how your kid [is doing] in this class. It’s good if you have time to go there.” That appeared to suggest that it was more effective for parents to have face-to-face conversations with teachers at school, perhaps because that was more intimate. She may have suggested that parents and teachers may delve deeper into discussions about “how your kid [is doing] in this class.” Having the time to meet with teachers at school appeared to be important to her because, on some level, parents and teachers may be able to speak more directly

about certain problems that children may be dealing with at school, and how best to address those issues.

Charles also believed that family-school partnerships meant that families and schools communicated with each other. This partnership may have been important to Charles, because learning often takes place across settings. He noted, "Child's education [starts] first at home, then second at school. Kids start learning at home how to walk, talk, and behave while academics and skills are learned at school. Home and school work together by [opening] the communication between teachers, parents and students." What this suggested was that respondents felt family-school partnerships were more effective when parents, students, and teachers were constantly engaged in working together. Charles appeared to suggest that teachers were responsible for academics at school, while parents taught and managed other issues, including behavior, at home. He also suggested that children learned across contexts, as learning may occur at home and school.

Charles also noted, "[T]eachers can encourage stronger partnership with families by educating them…Educate parents mean to provide, equip them [on] how they can help their kids at home and openly let them know what the teachers are doing at school." In talking about teachers and families working together, Charles added, "[Teachers and parents] must…keep each other informed regarding the progress of our kids either at home or at school." Implicit in "equip them [on] how they can help their kids at home" may have been the idea that teachers ought to provide additional support to families, perhaps because of the belief that teachers had more of an understanding of what children needed at school. With this statement, Charles may have suggested that some

Cambodian parents may need more support, especially adults who may not have the capacity to speak English well enough to communicate with school partners. Therefore, teachers may need to provide extra attention to those families.

Steve also noted that some Cambodian parents may require additional support from teachers, and therefore teachers should reach out to community members familiar with Cambodian families, in order to access more information about the student. To that point, Steve mentioned the following:

> [T]he best thing is [for teachers] to get to know the community or the community leader to find out [information]…the teacher has to know…I didn't get this information, and then find out through the community, "Okay, can you talk to this family because they have some kind of problem?"...[Or,] if the teacher did not get a response from the parent they might contact with the community leader to know what's going on…And what can teachers do to help them. So when they get a response from the community they may know how they can contact the parent.

Steve may have suggested that community members and community leaders were great resources for teachers to have, because "maybe [teachers] don't understand what's going on with the children" and therefore "the teacher has a big role to communicate and to contact with the community." He may have attributed the need for teachers to reach out to community members, given his understanding that Cambodian families may lack an awareness of the American school system, in part because they are new to the US. Thus, Steve stated, "[Cambodian families] are new here and they don't know much about situations in this country." Because Cambodians "are new here," that may have implied that American teachers are still largely unaware of who Cambodians are at school and in the community.

Steve's comment about the community was interesting. But I wanted to know more, particularly how, and to what extent, the community could be utilized as a liaison between teachers and families. How feasible was it for teachers to reach out to community members? Though a good idea, it could add an additional layer of work onto an already seemingly hectic schedule for teachers. There was also the concern that some school partners may not have access to information about Cambodian community partners. When asked about what ought to happen if school partners had a difficult time reaching out to these communities, which may prevent this partnership from being strengthened altogether, his response was:

> [T]eacher has to know because each ethnic group in this country they have to have some kind of community. And they have to find out which ethnicity they are and so they have to find out. Especially the principal and counselor at school they know because they always have a list or something. Right now they have a lot of things they can search on and they will know. They can contact with each community leader and find out that way. Because a lot of resources are available not like before.

That response suggested that information pertaining to Cambodian community partners were available, and perhaps school partners who were having trouble accessing parents should reach out to community members and leaders. Community members may help teachers, parents, and students resolve problems at school.

Again, themes were commonalities distributed across all seven interviews. Patterns, on the other hand, represented the voices of at least three participants. Under the first theme, *Building Family-School Partnerships through Communication*, there were two patterns: *Contacting Parents about Problems* and *Learning Culture between Families and Teachers*. Both patterns are described below.

Pattern a: contacting parents about problems. This pattern referred to communication as a way to share information about the child's progress, especially timely information for interventions to address academic and/or behavioral issues. Steve, David, Paula, Larry, Sarah, and Amy expressed the belief that families ought to communicate with school partners when children either demonstrated signs of or were currently dealing with problems at school, and therefore families were expected to interact with teachers.

Steve noted, "[We] have to have a good connection with the school teachers and find out what's the problem with your kids…[We] have to check with the school to make sure …if they have any behavior [issue] at school or anything like that we check, and what is the [academic] weakness for the kid, something that we can help, the teacher will know." Paula, addressing her own daughter, stated "[Families and teachers have to] talk to each other. I knew that [my daughter] is not good in something, because the teacher would write it down. And so I would talk to the teacher." Amy concurred by stating, "Talk to the counselors. Talk to the teachers, see how your child [is progressing] in school, if there's any problem," while Sarah noted, "It's good [for teachers] to let us know…whatever [students] do wrong so we can correct the kid." David also noted, "For some students who have problems, I think that teachers can encourage work together with parents so students can know weak points strong points whatever the student needs and what they need to be corrected. Tell them the right path… I think teachers play a strong role when the student has the problem."

These responses suggested that teachers ought to contact parents if students were having problems at school. Respondents may have assumed that there was no need to fix

anything that was not broken. Thus, if children's grades and behavior were passing and satisfactory, respectively, then parents may have assumed that nothing was wrong. Children were doing what they were supposed to do. On some level, there may not have been a need to bother teachers, given the belief that teachers have busy and hectic schedules.

However, these beliefs may not be limited to Cambodian families, as it may be a predominant trend across racial and ethnic groups across the United States. Thus, it appeared that families in general, Cambodians and non-Cambodians alike, tend to be present and active at school when there was a need to reconcile a problem that had been raised by a school partner. In which case, families would need to address that concern, perhaps because they wanted to avoid any repercussions, legal or otherwise, that may ensue. One might assume that family members did not want to seem negligent.

Larry, for example, admitted that his second grade son gets into quite a bit of trouble, and therefore he spent significant time discussing disciplinary issues with his teachers. He noted, "The teacher will send me a letter saying [my son is] doing this bad. So I have to go and talk to the teacher…[But,] to be a teacher you have to love the kids. You have to focus on whoever has the problem." However, Larry's concern was that teachers were not explicit enough in terms of what needed to be done to take corrective action. He noted, "[If] they tell me what needs to be done, I'll do it." Larry, who dropped out of high school, has said in passing that he did not feel that he had the requisite knowledge or tools to give his kids advice because of his own limited experiences, and therefore may be relying quite heavily on teachers to help in that regard.

Steve raised the issue about teachers being more explicit in supporting Cambodian families. He noted, "[T]eacher has to provide information to the parent. To let them know what's going on with your kid, either call or phone or [send] a letter and find out. That's a big thing that the teacher has to do with the parent." This was particularly the case for Cambodian adults who were not proficient in reading, writing, or speaking English. Steve went on to note, "[For] our Cambodian people…most of them don't understand English. When the teacher call they don't know what they're talking about. When the letter comes they don't know what it is, they just throw away. And that's the main thing for our [Cambodian] people here. Because most of them, they non-educated and they don't know what's going on and how they can help the children." In this instance, Steve may have referred to "hard-to-reach" parents who may have decided not to be more actively involved in their children's schooling experiences (e.g., throwing away letters from school because they cannot read English), perhaps because they do not know how to, in part given their limited English proficiency skills. In that regard, Steve may have suggested that teachers ought to provide information to parents whose children may have been struggling academically and/or behaviorally. Therefore, one might argue that having the opportunity to communicate pertinent information between teachers and parents, but in a way that meets families' linguistic needs and abilities, would help to ensure that problems at school can be identified. On some level, it also may have suggested that, for problems that occur at home, which could impact learning at school, that open channel of communication could be utilized to address such issues with teachers.

Pattern b: learning culture between families and teachers. This pattern referred to communication in terms of becoming more culturally aware of families. Respondents expressed concerns about the lack of cultural awareness among teachers at school, and how that could have painted a negative picture of families. Having a deeper cultural awareness may have prevented school partners from wrongly assuming that children were having problems at home, often because of disciplinary practices. It also may have prevented some Cambodian parents from getting into trouble with the law.

In referring to a story about someone else's family, Steve noted, "[T]here was a problem…when the teacher saw the children, you know that usually when the children get sick [Cambodian parents] get the coin and rub…*Preang Krolah* (i.e., Tiger Balm). And they rub [the body] to make it feel better. Teacher saw that and they called the police and asked, 'What's going on?'...That's why we have to teach [teachers], they have to know about our [Cambodian] culture." From this comment, Steve addressed a specific anecdote about how a traditional Cambodian medicinal practice (i.e., rubbing tiger balm on the body) was not only misconstrued by the teacher, but how it also had legal ramifications. This may have implied that the teacher did not stop to ask for an explanation, either directly from parents or others perhaps more familiar with the Cambodian people. Instead, this teacher may have assumed prematurely that it was some form of child abuse. Perhaps the teacher may have avoided calling the police with a better understanding of the Cambodian culture, which might have happened by openly communicating with parents about such cultural practices.

However, Steve also noted that cultural understanding was not a one-way street. Cambodian families also had an obligation to better understand the American system. He

stated, "[Cambodians] have to learn from [Americans], you know the culture. You cannot beat the children; you cannot do anything [bad onto] the children. That's the way that we can learn from each other and also we can tell our children also about this." In this comment, Steve appeared to suggest that Cambodian families could learn from American cultural norms, particularly in terms of how to discipline children without resorting to physical punishment, which could lead to abuse.

David also recalled a story about cultural awareness, and how one Cambodian family got into trouble with the law. He shared a story about someone else's family:

> One of the family that had a problem the student coming home and the parent asked them to do the homework and the student don't want to do the homework and the parent said, "I'm going to spank you if you don't do that." And the student said, "If you spank me I'm going to call the police," and then the student said, "Okay, go ahead and spank me!" And the parent spank them and [the child] call the police.

David spoke to the act of disciplining children from the perspective of one Cambodian family. There appeared to be differences between the so-called Americanized child and Cambodian parents in terms of the cultural norms of spanking. On that point, David further noted, "Between teachers [and parents], it looks like a 'cross-culture' because as a Cambodian family, we strictly discipline them. But in this country, if we discipline them sometimes it's against the law… But as Asians, we try to discipline them because we want them to go to the right path. But sometimes we do in the good heart but it turn out against the law…And I think that [Americans] should understand our culture." Similar to Steve, David believed that Americans ought to learn about the Cambodian culture, which may include norms and practices, perhaps to avoid

misjudging Cambodian parents who, in this case, may have found it particularly necessary to spank their child in order to help him stay on "the right path."

David also noted, "[In] our [Cambodian] culture the parent has the right to discipline the children as long as we not hurt them so bad," which may have suggested that David was not supporting extreme physical abuse, but rather spanking as a necessary means to discipline children. He further noted, "[S]ometimes as a child we got to discipline them and tell them the right way. And sometimes they are hardhead and need to be disciplined and over here in this culture that is against the law." From David's comment, it appeared that he was asking Americans, and perhaps American teachers, to better understand how Cambodian parents disciplined children, perhaps to avoid assuming that children were being abused at home. Having conversations with Cambodian parents about these concerns may have enabled teachers to learn why parents believe corporal punishment is effective. In having these conversations, parents may have shared that spanking their children was one way to ensure that young people do not fall through the cracks, whether at school or in society.

Larry, who also shared David's observation regarding corporal punishment, believed that spanking sometimes was necessary in disciplining children. In his experience, he noted, "Back then [in the homeland], the teacher, when you do something wrong, they spank you, which my dad was okay with that. I wish it would be the same way right now." Larry further noted, "Right now, the kids are being bad, all the way from home to school. They don't respect teachers." Larry may have expressed his concerns regarding the level of "disrespect" shown by young people today towards adults. Because of that lack of respect, sometimes young people should be spanked.

Larry may have brought this up, because it was how he disciplined his son when he got into trouble. Larry may have believed that spanking was more effective than using time-out or grounding.

Spanking is not a Cambodian specific cultural phenomenon. Other countries and cultures, including those practiced in the United States, utilize spanking as a way to discipline children. However, what may have been interesting, in the views shared here, was the belief that in countries like Cambodia teachers were viewed as parents. On some level, parents often gave teachers full disciplinary rights to spank their children without consequences onto teachers. For example, David discussed how this cultural norm of spanking children was not only condoned by parents, but was a shared practice between families and teachers in Cambodia. "[E]ven though they go to school, in Cambodia the teacher can discipline them to some extent but not to hurt our children. Over here [in America] when [teachers] spank the student it looks like it's against the law." Again, David suggested that Cambodian teachers had permission to use corporal punishment if children were misbehaving, so long as teachers knew their limits and "not hurt them so bad." David further stated, "[In] our culture the teachers looks like the parents, next to the parent is the teacher." This might suggest that teachers were an extension of parents at school, and disciplining children was a shared responsibility.

In reference to "it's against the law," David may have referred to those states in the US that have banned corporal punishment, whether at home or at school – thus making it illegal. He may have referred to school corporal punishment only being legal under domestic law in 20 states of the United States.[1] And, to that point, teachers

[1] See Stephey, M.J., "Corporal Punishment in U.S. Schools," Time, New York, 12 August 2009. Retrieved 16 April 2012 from: http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1915820,00.html.

residing outside of those states, functioning under their respective laws, may be held legally liable for spanking their students – though parents like Larry may have given them permission to spank his children.

Thus, learning about cultural differences – whether traditional medicinal practices or spanking as a seemingly acceptable form of disciplinary practice – may be an effective way for teachers and families to communicate with each other. Communicating in this manner could help adults to better understand one another. However, how can schools draw upon the culture of the home when the home experience includes major social upheavals and political traumas?

2. What Do Cambodian Family Members Say Can Be Done In Order to Optimize Learning for Children at School?

The second research question described different ways families and schools can work together in order to help Cambodian students in their schooling experience. That included parents monitoring and, if possible, assisting children's homework, attending all meetings requested by school partners, and supporting children despite limited English proficiency in terms of reading, writing, or speaking.

Supporting Children with Schoolwork at Home and School

This theme referred to Cambodian families supporting young people at home and school. One way to support children was to check and monitor homework completion. Steve noted, "I always encourage them to pay attention on their homework that they got from school." One might assume that Steve applied a significant amount of weight in making sure that his children completed homework assignments, in part because it was an

effective way to monitor whether or not his children were on track to pass classes. Based on how Steve's children performed academically and perhaps professionally – i.e., they have graduated from high school and have earned degrees from college – we can say that this parental support system was effective for Steve's family. In addition to homework patrol, Steve also encourages his kids to be constant learners. He adds, "[T]hey have to read the book to find out more and try to do more research you know whatever they can. Find resources to help them." Similar to this, David noted, "As long as we encourage our children to do the homework and do good at school I think it's good enough. But if they have a question to me, and if I can help, I answer them. But if not sometimes, I don't."

While Paula's observation regarding the importance of asking about homework completion aligned with Steve, she spoke from the perspective of a single mother. She pointed out, "With me, my daughter was all I had. I had no husband. So I put all of what I had minus three hours of sleep…on her. So every time the children come home, and you don't ask them, 'You don't have homework today?' They don't think you care. I asked her every day, 'What homework do you need help?'" Paula stressed the importance of being involved in her daughter's life, which included asking about daily homework assignments, not least because it demonstrated to her child that she cared.

Paula believed that families have to be vigilant in supporting their children. She mentioned, "You have to know your children. You can't sit down and watch TV and [assume] that they have finished working. You have to see them finish working. You want them to study. You can't just say, 'Hey, you didn't study you just watch TV'…[T]hey think, 'My mom don't care no matter what I do she thinks I'm lazy. But I'm not. I finished my homework…I finished it…that's why I'm watching TV.'" Paula

appeared to suggest that Cambodian parents ought to actively engage in asking specific questions about whether or not children have completed homework assignments. Perhaps parents ought to avoid making false assumptions that children were "lazy," or that they were only interested in watching TV, when it fact they have already completed their assignments for class.

However, Paula admitted that she was able to help her daughter with homework assignments, in large part because she was a trained scientist who was expected to complete courses in high-level math and science. She noted, "Of course, I was educated so I was in a position to help her with her homework, especially math and science." Paula also admitted that many Cambodian parents did not have the capacity to provide such assistance to their children, but interestingly enough she added "especially mothers" which really stood out. It was interesting because she singled out women, in the process of not only being educated but also in having the capacity to learn and then re-teach children those difficult subjects.

Regarding homework patrol, Paula also noted, "[You] don't have to have a degree. You don't have to have knowledge. You just have to ask, 'Do you have your homework?' Is it difficult? What did you learn today?'" From this comment, Paula appeared to suggest that taking the initiative in asking whether or not they have completed homework assignments was an important way for Cambodian parents to stay involved, even if adults did not have the means to assist their children.

Sarah also shared her views, particularly by visiting her son at school on her days off. To her, this was an opportunity to speak with teachers directly, while on some level showing her son that she still cared. She noted, "[E]very Tuesday, on my day off, I go

and eat lunch with [my son]. I always ask the teacher how my kid [is] doing. If they get along with other kids, if he's a good boy. I try to ask them… it makes the kids happy. It makes them feel like the mother still needs them and care about them." On a voluntary basis, Sarah went to her son's school to eat lunch, while speaking with teachers to determine whether her son was making good progress at school. Sarah also has an older teenage daughter in high school, and when I asked about whether she visited her daughter at school, she responded, "Yes, not right now, but when she was little." Perhaps this suggested that Sarah was more actively involved when her children were much younger.

Larry wanted school partners to be more specific about what he can do to support his children. He noted, "Make sure he do homework. Make sure he read. Make sure he do that instead of watching TV, instead of playing…My kids, I ask, 'Do you have homework?' They say, 'Yes.' I make sure they do the homework." Larry might be viewed as a parent who could benefit from receiving more information from teachers about what could be done to support the child's learning at home.

Charles and Amy also addressed the importance of families supporting their children at home and school. Charles, who received some post-secondary education in the United States, noted "[Families] can involve with school activities, help their children doing homework, read with them, attend school meeting related to their child progress, pay a visit to their classroom once in a while." Amy, the only respondent who attended K-12 school in the US indicated, "[Parents should go] to PTA meetings. Talk to the counselors. Talk to the teachers...And help [children] out with homework." These respondents appeared to suggest that they were perhaps comfortable interacting with school partners at school.

Paula also believed that Cambodian parents ought to attend every school meeting. She noted:

> What I have noticed about most Cambodians is I have never missed a PTA meeting…but I'm different. I never missed anything, teacher conference, you know I go to everything, school opening, and I befriend all of the teachers. Parents have to do that. Cambodian parents don't know what PTA is. Honestly, don't know what PTA is? They never go to the meeting at the opening of school and when schools call the parents for a conference, they don't know what that is.

Paula may have suggested that it was important to use different types of family-school partnerships, including PTAs, open houses, and parent-teacher conferences, for parents to interact with teachers and other school partners. Perhaps Paula made this suggestion given her level of education and professional background. To reiterate, Paula held a PhD in science and was a college instructor. She was among the first Cambodian, if not Southeast Asian women to earn a doctorate in the US. Thus, one might assume that Paula was perhaps more inclined to being an involved parent because of her own experiences. And, in stating, "Cambodian parents don't know what PTA is," Paula may have suggested that Cambodian families lacked even the most basic understanding of not only what PTAs were, but how to effectively utilize this type of family-school partnership in order to support young people at school.

In addition, Paula also spoke to how she volunteered at her daughter's school, even though, as a single mother, she had very little disposable time. Sharing a story about her own family, she noted, "At lunch time I went to help sell ice cream. I volunteered for one hour during my lunch time. I take my sandwich and I served the students ice cream in the cafeteria. I did everything I could with the time I didn't have. And I want Cambodian parents to do that." In that comment, Paula may have implied

that even busy parents can find a way to support young people at school, which included volunteering for school-based activities.

Steve brought up another interesting point. It was the belief that families ought to support their children, despite not knowing how to speak, write, or read English. He believed that parents dealing with language barriers ought to find someone who was proficient in English, in order to read letters sent home to their children or to interpret between parents and teachers. He noted, “Any letter [Cambodian parents] don’t understand or whatever, they have to cooperate with [the teacher], go and ask them or get somebody to help. If they don’t speak the language then they need to find somebody who knows, because if the parent is willing to help the children they have to find somebody to help.” Steve appeared to suggest that Cambodian parents ought to find the requisite support, and in this case an English speaking person, who can help read letters or communicate with teachers.

Sharing Steve’s belief, Paula suggested that parents can be engaged even if they cannot speak English well or at all. She noted, “I would like to go to every Cambodian and say, ‘Hey, put your attention to her teacher, to her school, go to the meeting.’ [Cambodian parents] don’t do that…It’s okay if they can’t understand what students are studying, but go show the student, show your son your daughter that hey, daddy cares. He can barely read English but he does care…He wants to see my teacher…[Parents] might say, ‘Oh, why should I go? I don’t speak English?’” To that point, Paula suggested that Cambodian parents do not have to speak English well or even at all. However, the act of parents supporting their children’s learning may be sufficient, and it demonstrated to children that their parents do care about them. This also may have suggested that even

though some parents may not understand how to read, write, or speak English, thus unaware of what was transpiring in terms of homework assignments or what their children were learning, Paula believed that non-English speaking families could, at the most basic level, show up to school functions and be present.

In addition to checking with children, Steve also addressed how parents have to check with schools regarding attendance, homework, and any behavioral issues. He noted, "[As] a parent, we have to check with the school to make sure that [children] are attending school regularly and that they do and return their homework…something that we can help the teacher will know. Sometimes the parents don't know but we have to check at school to make sure that everything is okay." This comment may have suggested that parents have to check with school partners to make sure that children were doing well at school, versus relying solely on information shared by children. It also implies that parents should not wait until they hear from teachers, or children themselves, that young people were struggling at school.

Paula also addressed the importance of giving children "high hope" in the process of engaging young people in the learning process. She shared a story about her own family:

> When the school had a spelling bee, my daughter had the second number [i.e., second place]. Another friend of hers who came from Thailand, her father was also a teacher, won [the spelling bee] from that school…I gave [my daughter] hope that 'It's not difficult, I can help you. And I help you every day. After dinner instead of watching TV, we can study the book.' …You can't just say, "Ah, you're not good enough, you're not good at spelling. Why should you [enter] your name in the spelling bee?" I told her, 'Go ahead, honey, I'll help you.' And she almost won. She was number two. For me it's good enough.

The spelling bee contest was optional. By Paula helping to prepare her daughter for the contest, she was not necessarily helping her daughter with class work per se. However, Paula wanted to be supportive to her daughter, to give her "high hope."

Paula's level of involvement and giving young people "high hope" may have been a reflection of her personality. As a college instructor, she was equally engaged with her students. She recalled being proud of working with one struggling student in particular who was on the verge of being kicked out of school because of grades. That student could not afford to fail her class, and Paula took matters into her own hands. Paula noted, "There's an example and I'm really proud of that. I sit down with this student, 'You have only 10 days before the final exam. You have an F right now. You know what. You're not stupid. You just don't pay attention.'" For the next 10 days, Paula told the student to see her after class. She asked about the content that was taught each day, and if he answered incorrectly then she knew he did not understand. Her words of encouragement, giving him hope, and then ensuring that he understood the material helped him earn a "C" for that class, noting there was a curve. Paula also shared that she ran into the student one day at a shopping mall, and he thanked her. That was a really proud moment for Paula.

For respondents, family-school partnerships can be utilized to optimize learning for children, especially when families and teachers worked together. Some examples of how parents can support their children at home and school include monitoring homework completion, making sure children attended classes, volunteering at school functions, and checking in with teachers to make sure children were doing well at school.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION

The conventional definition against which this study is positioned is the idea that family-school partnerships are formal or informal relationships established between families, teachers, principals, counselors, and others in the community, particularly in supporting the schooling experiences of students (e.g., Epstein, 1995, 2001a, 2001b; Epstein & Jansorn, 2004; Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

However, my study takes issue with conventional definitions of family-school partnerships. Joyce Epstein's definition, for example, is general and limited in scope, in part because her framing is culturally generic: she does not account for the many and varied cultures of different ethnic minority groups in her definition of family-school partnerships. How, for example, can Cambodian families be included as participants in school decisions when they do not have ownership in schools, or if they feel uncomfortable interacting with school partners, perhaps given limited English proficiency? Traditional partnerships tend to make broad assumptions of how Cambodian parents can get involved, in part because Cambodian voices have not been documented in practice or extant literature and research.

Adults interviewed for this study take family-school partnerships to mean how families and school partners ought to "communicate" with each other, particularly in addressing a problem at school. The idea of understanding culture came up with some respondents. Respondents also discussed supporting young people with schoolwork at

home and school, which includes making sure they complete homework assignments and attend classes.

Communicating between Families and Schools

Respondents reported that family-school partnerships are more effective when families and schools work together. Findings build on extant literature and research on family-school partnerships, but only to the extent that families and school partners ought to communicate pertinent information about the child's progress, especially timely information for interventions, in addition to understanding cultural differences between American and Cambodian families. On some level, findings may suggest that the standard concept of family-school partnerships is understood by respondents in the most basic form, in part because the idea of partnerships may be too complex, if not too rigid, for Cambodian adults.

Steve, for example, stated, "Relationship is very important for the parent and the school…[W]e have to have a good connection with the school teachers and find out what's the problem with your kids." He added, "[At] school they always have teacher and parents meet…and that's the partnership." Paula believed that parents and teachers should communicate at school, because "that's the time when your children are not there. Adults [are] talking." Amy was more specific, noting, "Go to PTA meetings. Talk to the counselors. Talk to the teachers." David also added, [If] my children have a problem at school, I think that is a good communication. [Teachers] call me, they send a letter." Charles noted, "Home and school work together by [opening] the communication between teachers, parents and students."

Joyce Epstein (1995) believed that family and school partnerships have many positive benefits, because “they can…connect families with others in the school and in the community, and help teachers with their work” (p. 701). Epstein’s research is useful in providing a general framework for understanding the positive contributions of family-school partnerships. Thus, partnerships appear to have positive outcomes on the family and child, including increased family involvement, increased attendance, reading, writing, and math achievement, improved report card grades, and behavior (see also Epstein, 1995, 2001a, 2001b; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002).

Epstein also asserted that family-school partnerships tend to work more effectively when they are influenced by the school, family, and community contexts in which students interact, learn, grow, and socialize. She referred to these contexts as “spheres of influence.” When these spheres overlap, they can strengthen the communication among all partners. Reaching out to community partners can bridge the communication gap between schools and families. Steve stated, [T]he best thing is [for teachers] to get to know the community or the community leader…if the teacher did not get a response from the parent they might contact with the community leader to know what’s going on.” Community partners may not only understand the cultural nuances of both families and schools, but are able to effectively liaise and bridge the divide between them. Though Epstein’s work does not disaggregate for ethnicity or race, especially for Cambodians or Southeast Asians, her general assertions about the role of community partners are useful in making sense of this finding, in part because it explores the idea of utilizing community partners as cultural brokers between teachers and families, especially guardians who may be difficult to access and reach.

Leichter's (1997) research on the family is useful in helping my study make sense of findings, in part because her study appears to suggest that conventional definitions of family-school partnerships – similar to those proposed by Epstein (1995) – may be too rigid. She noted, "[T]he idea is sometimes phrased in such general terms that it has the aura of a truism – it cannot be faulted – and yet it lacks the adequate imagery for working out particular situations that may arise under different circumstances with different families" (1997, 74). Here, Leichter suggests that traditional family-school connections may be too general to provide an "adequate imagery" which enables families to share their unique stories with school partners. Traditional partnerships may oversimplify who these families are, and one might argue that squeezing unique stories into general terms may lend itself to a misunderstanding, if not misdiagnosis, of the various issues that impact these families. Therefore, Leichter proposes sharing family stories and family memories, because they allow partners to communicate and thus engage in deep, meaningful discussions in which families have multiple opportunities to develop and share their authentic voices.

Moll and colleagues'(1992) study was also useful in making sense of findings, in part because it relies on the production of knowledge by ethnic minority families and community members. Once knowledge is produced, it is then communicated to and shared with school partners. Teachers do not have a say in the production of such knowledge. Their study challenges the generality of conventional definitions of family-school partnerships, by exploring what ethnic minority families have to say in connecting families and school partners. It may be difficult, for example, to know what the Cambodian adults for my study mean by family-school partnerships, much less what they

need to better support their children, without having direct conversations with them. However, it may also be difficult for teachers to support Cambodian families if mechanisms are not in place to exchange information.

Cambodian families interviewed for this study may have addressed, albeit generally, the idea that families and schools can work together, in part because family-school partnerships were already a larger part of their children's schools. Thus, the idea of family-school partnerships may have evolved over time, perhaps over the course of roughly 30 years. We can see this evolution, for example, starting with Cremin's earlier discussion of the family as educator, to Epstein's conventional definition of family-school partnerships, to Leichter's idea about family stories and family memories as "adequate imagery," to Moll's discussion of ethnic minority family-school connections by way of families and communities producing and transmitting knowledge themselves, before sharing that knowledge with teachers. Paula was the oldest respondent of the group, and her daughter entered the K-12 system in 1980 and exited in 1993. This was about the time when discussions about the family as educator started to take root, and by the time Paula's daughter had completed high school, family-school partnerships were already implemented at the school level.

Furthermore, traditional partnerships such as parent-teacher meetings as referenced by Steve and Larry, for example, or PTAs as described more explicitly by Amy and Paula, were probably talked about during their interviews because family-school partnerships may already have been implemented at their children's respective school. While traditional partnerships were not foreign to respondents, what is interesting is the way in which they define such partnerships. One might be led to ask:

would their definitions of family-school partnerships be more than "communication between families and school partners," had they been exposed to more nuanced forms of partnerships, one perhaps accounting for the many and varied lived experiences of ethnic minority Cambodian families? Respondents may not have been able to imagine beyond their own experiences, and perhaps if their experiences had been different, their responses might have been too. However, one might argue that as conventional definitions of family-school partnerships get teased out even further, challenged by the work of researchers like Leichter and Moll, and even the work of this dissertation, that perhaps definitions of family-school partnerships too may evolve with time.

Information to Support Newcomer Families and Schools

Today, family-school partnerships are accounting for different ethnic minority family perspectives. According to Colorin Colorado,[1] which is a bilingual site for families and educators of English language learners, educators and school leaders can utilize many strategies to better connect with newcomer families. For example, they suggest integrating cultural traditions of ELL families throughout the school. One strategy is for schools to schedule classes around important cultural or religious holidays to prevent newcomer students from missing important instruction time, exams, and school events. They also recommend that educators and school leaders find unique ways to communicate important information to newcomer families. So, for example, schools can establish a two-way communication process that works for schools and families, but that process should be formal, steady, and reliable. Colorin Colorado points out that sending notes home in English or speaking slower and louder have proven to be

[1] See http://www.colorincolorado.org/

ineffective in working with families who cannot speak or understand English proficiently. They also recommend that schools identify ways for ELL parents to help with children's schoolwork. Some strategies include: 1) providing a place where children can do homework; 2) checking that homework has been completed each night; 3) asking children to tell them what they have learned each day; 4) keeping in regular contact with a teacher or staff member about their child's progress; 5) asking teachers about any questions that may arise; 6) learning about homework help programs through before- or after-school programs and the public library; and 7) reading and telling stories in their native language.[1]

Some refugee/newcomer families may also require human services support, perhaps beyond what schools can provide, given the hardships and circumstances under which they have entered the United States. As such, there are family strengthening resources that can be used to support refugee parents. Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services (BRYCS) is one such organization that provides resources to refugee families. They work with newcomer parents to help them to better understand childrearing practices in the United States, in addition to building and supporting refugee family stability. To do this, they work with ethnic community organizations to help refugee families to better integrate into American society.

According to BRYCS, refugee parents often rely on parenting skills that are most familiar to them. These skills not only vary significantly by culture, but are often based on traditional practices of the homeland, and the method for disciplining children could

[1] For more information on strategies, see http://www.colorincolorado.org/pdfs/guides/Engaging-ELL-Families.pdf

be so extreme that it could warrant child welfare intervention. David's story of the young man who called law enforcement on his parents may be one example here.

In working with refugee families, BRYCS points out that family strengthening services should include the following: Assist refugees with integration and daily functioning, specifically around literacy development, culturally relevant child care, family preservation services, and parent-child programming.

However, for refugee families that experience some form of family separation, BRYCS recommends the following services: Helping families deal with the changes wrought by separation; aiding relatives in establishing legal guardianship for non-biological children in their care; and assisting families in reuniting with relatives and support overall family functioning.

Addressing Problems to Support Children

Findings also suggest that families and schools should communicate in order to address problems children are having at school, which may require bringing other people into the conversation including community partners and school counselors. For example, Steve noted, "[We] have to…find out what's the problem with your kids…[We] have to check with the school to make sure …if they have any behavior [issue] at school…and what is the [academic] weakness." Paula stated, "[Families and teachers have to] talk to each other. I knew that [my daughter] is not good in something, because the teacher would write it down." Amy stated, "[S]ee how your child [is progressing] in school, if there's any problem," while Sarah noted, "It's good [for teachers] to let us know…whatever [students] do wrong so we can correct the kid." David also noted, "I

think teachers play a strong role when the student has the problem." These responses suggest that family-school partnerships work when teachers contacted parents about problems students have at school.

Epstein and Voorhis (2010) argued that family-school partnerships can be utilized to address problems by getting other school staff members to support teachers and families, noting "[A]ll partners who care about students have roles to play in both prevention and treatment interventions" (p. 7). Thus, teachers, administrators, and school counselors can collaborate to find ways to support families, and "prevent or reduce the problems that school counselors, presently, try to solve alone" (p. 1). They further noted that schools often report fewer disciplinary actions when effective family-school partnerships are created. Epstein and Voorhis also noted, "Some teachers think that they, alone, are responsible for children's learning and success in school," while adding "[S]ome school counselors think that they, alone, are responsible for solving students' problems, as if neither teachers nor parents were critical partners for students in trouble" (p. 7). School partners can share with families specific behavioral interventions they can use at home. These interventions are also used by teachers and counselors at school.

Addressing problems at school is not necessarily a Cambodian-specific issue. Many parents, of all races and ethnicities, often work with teachers when children have problems. Respondents may have raised this issue, in part because of the belief that teachers are doing their job, so long as children are doing well academically and/or behaviorally, as David for example described in his interview. But if children are having problems, perhaps at that point parents ought to intervene and work with teachers to seek appropriate resolutions. And, to them, that is the extent of family-school partnerships.

However, there was no mention about families and schools connecting if young people experience problems at home. Perhaps respondents did not feel it was the school's responsibility to address home-based problems, in part because they are private matters. On some level, parents may not have raised this issue out of concern that their parenting style may be too strict, and perhaps against the law, to David's point about disciplining children. One might argue that opportunities for parents to talk about home-based problems at school may not have been available to them, in the course of communicating between teachers and parents through traditional partnerships. This may get at the concern that conventional partnerships may be too general, and as a result, parents may have ignored talking about these issues more directly during traditional PTAs and parent-teacher meetings, focusing strictly on school-based academic and behavioral concerns. Or, if opportunities are afforded to them at school, perhaps the appropriate mechanisms are not in place to make Cambodian parents feel comfortable or safe sharing sensitive information in public. But one could also argue that problems at home and school are not mutually exclusive, and as such, having the time and space to discuss home and school problems, with culturally sensitive techniques and professionals to aid Cambodian families in the process, may enable families to discuss these issues more openly with school partners. To Leichter's (1997) point regarding family stories, perhaps then family-school partnerships may be able to work out particular situations that may arise under different circumstances with different families.

This idea is supported by the NCAS (2000) study, which proposes developing programs that account for the voices and perspectives of Southeast Asian families, working in collaboration with schools and community partners. The study found that

many family members, including Cambodians, come from countries in which freedom of expression is not tolerated. These families often show deference to authority figures such as school teachers and staff members, as well as government officials. In a sense, family members do not feel comfortable expressing themselves so freely. However, the NCAS study demonstrated that if opportunities are given to Southeast Asian families to have their voices heard, not only would they speak up, but recommendations are offered to make family-school partnerships more effective, for both families and school partners.

Overcoming Cultural Barriers

Findings also suggest that families and school partners should communicate to become more culturally aware of Cambodian families. For example, Steve noted, "[W]e have to teach [teachers], they have to know about our [Cambodian] culture." David mentioned, "Between teachers [and parents], it looks like a 'cross-culture' because as a Cambodian family, we strictly discipline them…[Americans] should understand our culture." Steve also noted, "[Cambodians] have to learn from [Americans], you know the culture. You cannot beat the children; you cannot do anything [bad onto] the children."

Findings indicate that some families continue to endorse strict, or conservative, practices in disciplining children. The use of corporal punishment appears to be tolerated by Larry and David, though Steve speaks against it, and supporting corporal punishment may in part be a result of their own strict upbringing. Larry, for example, gives permission to teachers to spank his children, if the need to do so was justified. Those practices, however, typically are not accepted or practiced by mainstream America.

David reminded us that, "[W]e strictly discipline them. But in this country, if we discipline them sometimes it's against the law."

Existing research does not speak to learning about corporal punishment as a way to strengthen family-school partnerships, especially for Cambodian Americans. However, Tran, Lee, and Khoi (1996) examined stressful life events in a sample of 70 Southeast Asians, specifically among Cambodian, Hmong, and Vietnamese adolescents. Their study found that Cambodians rank strict discipline in social life by parents as the most stressful. Hmong and Vietnamese adolescents report doing house chores and academic pressure to do well, respectively, as the most stressful. While strict discipline does not necessarily mean corporal punishment, one might argue that mixed cultural signals may have been sent to Cambodian adolescents in Tran and colleagues' study. That is, Cambodian adolescents might experience strict discipline in social life at home, while at school they interact with American peers who experience more social freedom. These cultural signals may be confusing for young Cambodians, and that may create problems at home and school. In interviewing a small sample of Hmong-American students, Thao (2003) examined how, and to what extent, home and school factors interact with each other. His study found that differences in culture (or, what Thao refers to as "cultural clash") at school and at home undermine family-school partnerships. Pho's (2007) research also found disconnects between cultural expectations at home and school. Quoting one Vietnamese student, Pho noted, "What we learned in school sometimes was different from what we were taught at home…While our teachers wanted us to talk in class and to be independent, our parents wanted us to be quiet and respect older people" (2007, 70). The absence of a clear cultural understanding – between

teachers and families – can complicate the learning experiences of young Cambodians. These cultural miscues may have prompted that young man in David's interview, for example, to threaten his parents with legal enforcement, if they spanked him, when their intentions may have been good. Perhaps all they wanted to do was to protect him. Other studies indicated that first-generation immigrant parents often administer corporal punishment as a form of disciplining their children, though some American courts have deemed such practices too excessive (see, for example, Renteln, 2010).

Findings from this study also build on studies that address cultural barriers for Southeast Asian Americans. For example, the NCAS study pointed out, "Language and cultural barriers exclude many Southeast Asian parents from learning about school policies and ways they can participate in home-school activities" (2000, 7). The inability to speak English well, or at all, could prevent Cambodian families from supporting children with homework assignments. Non-English speaking parents may not know how to access information and resources to help young people at school. One example could be the idea or process of Advanced Placement (AP) or SAT exams for college, and making sure that children get applications in on time. Not being able to speak, read, or write English could prevent parents from finding appropriate SAT prep courses or after-school and summer programs often afforded to their more affluent peers.

In particular, the NCAS study is intended for schools serving small and large concentrations of Southeast Asian families. One might argue that where larger concentrations of Cambodian students are present, there may be more resources, buy-in, and a sense of urgency on the part of school partners to address unique challenges facing these individuals. Thus, school leaders and administrators may create and implement

policies and programs that cater to the needs of Cambodian students and their families. Where fewer Cambodian students attend these schools, however, it may be equally important to understand the challenges that continue to grip these families. And while funding priorities may not be directly targeted at Cambodians, given the minimal representation in schools, for example, one might argue that American schools can make a veritable attempt to understand families' unique needs and concerns. They also can create and implement effective policies and programs that focus perhaps more broadly on cultural differences, and how said differences may impact the learning experiences of young Cambodians in each school setting.

However, practicality would dictate that schools and school districts serving large concentrations of Cambodians, for example Lowell, MA and Long Beach, CA, may be compelled to act more swiftly in terms of developing and implementing appropriate family-school partnership policies and programs serving these families, as compared to a city like Houston, TX. Perhaps the needs are greater in those particular neighborhoods and communities. However, there may be something to be said about the importance of honoring cultural differences for all American schools serving even one Cambodian student. With so many "newly arrived" Southeast Asians in the US, filling up schools all across America, it may be problematic for school partners to continue drawing gross generalizations about the AAPI community. This may be the case given a growing number of Southeast Asian families in the US – and more particularly Cambodians, Hmong, Laotians, and Vietnamese – who continue to struggle in educational settings often in poor urban centers. One might argue that it is important to stress the dire need to collaborate efforts, between families and schools, so that real solutions can be found to

address real problems affecting these families, again in both large and small pockets of Cambodian communities in the US. This may get at the core of educational equity for all students.

Lastly, the assumption that cultural barriers are challenges for ethnic Cambodian parents is supported by Aung and Yu (2007). They found that Cambodian parents often lack formal education and do not have the necessary skills or tools to help their children navigate schools, in part because they "do not understand how to maneuver within the American education system" (2007, 93). The authors further noted that "because of these cultural barriers, as well as linguistic and educational challenges, many Cambodian parents…are unable to advocate effectively for their children in the public education system" (p. 94). And having the capacity to "advocate effectively" is important because one might argue that families could advocate more effectively for the child than any other adult or person. And though teachers can be strong advocates, there is reason to believe that they often cannot do it effectively – for every child – because teachers are responsible for many other students. Cultural understanding may have been addressed by respondents, as they recognized the on-going challenges it presents to Cambodian families, particularly in the context of working with schools and raising their children in a new country.

Taking Steps at Home to Support Family-School Partnerships

Findings also suggest that parents can support family-school partnerships by taking steps to support their children at home. Those steps include monitoring the completion of homework assignments, making sure children attend classes, and

participating in school-based meetings. For example, Steve noted, "I always encourage them to pay attention on their homework that they got from school." David added, "As long as we encourage our children to do the homework and do good at school I think it's good enough," while Paula mentioned, "I asked [my daughter] every day, 'What homework do you need help?'" Larry also noted, "I ask, 'Do you have homework?' They say, 'Yes.' I make sure they do the homework."

These findings are supported by Pho's (2007) study. Pho explained that the idea of family involvement in school may differ between ethnic minority families and American teachers. In terms of family-school partnerships, Pho found that "while teachers complained that family members rarely came to school open houses or attended parent-teacher conferences, family members thought they participated sufficiently in their children's school education by reminding their children to do homework and teaching them the value of education" (2007, 81). Checking for homework completion may be one way for Cambodian parents to ensure that children are learning academic content and therefore not falling behind or failing academically. Monitoring homework may also signal to teachers that Cambodian parents are doing their part to support the family-school partnership, especially when young people are away from school. Checking homework may also help parents to determine whether or not their children are having other issues at school unrelated to homework or grades. In checking homework, parents might come to find that young people are dealing with social stresses that are impacting their ability to focus on completing homework assignments. Supporting children at home by monitoring homework completion may further prevent young people from having problems at school and from getting into trouble with teachers, which may prompt a

parent-teacher conference similar to the one Larry described in his interview. Thus, respondents may have discussed family-school partnerships in this way, in part because that is how they can help to optimize learning for young people in the schooling process.

With the exception of Larry explicitly talking about his son getting into trouble at school, respondents may have talked about the importance of supporting children at home, in part because their children did not have academic and/or behavioral problems at school. Many respondents did note that their children were passing classes, many of whom graduated from high school and college on time. Perhaps families would have responded differently, if not adversely, to my interview questions, if their children had experienced academic and/or behavioral problems at school, or if their previous interactions with teachers were unproductive. Instead of talking about parents monitoring homework, for example, they may have been more direct, like Larry, in suggesting that teachers be more specific about what he can do to support his son. Their views on family-school partnerships may have been less optimistic. Perhaps they would have viewed teachers as the problem and not the solution in helping their children to optimize learning at school. Perhaps parents would have been more detailed and nuanced in their proposition to collaborate with school teachers, if their experiences in working with school partners had been more challenging.

Limitations of the Study

Methods

There were methodological limitations that affected the study. One limitation was the execution of the data collection process. Data gathering was interrupted (by work and

other matters) and was not continuous during the data gathering period. Data collection was rushed and cut short, because I was in a hurry to leave for Cambodia. There were decisions I had made, for example, like using the interview protocols without piloting them first. The research could have been improved by taking the time to pilot questions. As a result, the weakness was in the quality of my interview protocols, the kind of interviews conducted (what I actually did versus what I planned to do), and the amount of time devoted to gathering data – in this case it was very minimal.

In thinking about methodology, there might have been different ways of collecting data. I do acknowledge, at this point, that perhaps interviews alone were not sufficient, and confining interviews to Cambodian adults within a small church had a negative impact on my study. I may have been too concerned about privacy and trust-building to the point that it limited my study significantly. Perhaps I should have been more pragmatic, if not honest with myself, about accessibility to data regarding members of the Cambodian church. There is reason to believe that because I did not collect data from within an organization or institution within which I was presently embedded, that may have been a major limitation, especially in terms of having access to prospective participants and high-quality data. Perhaps what I should have done, similar to many of my peers in doctoral programs, stuck in similar situations regarding accessibility, was to analyze published and publicly available documents (e.g., policies, speeches, law, etc.), and discover findings through that process. The limitation there, of course, is that it presents challenges to my overall quest to give voice to the voiceless, to Cambodian adults who often are not afforded opportunities to share their views on family-school

partnerships more publicly. Nevertheless, it may have given me access to a wealth of information from which a stronger dissertation may have been written.

Small Sample

I attempted to use purposive sampling to select participants. In the end, however, I had to take whomever said yes, with the exception of the two adults where I suspected the child was responding. This was a huge limitation that I could not purposefully sample. Because of the small sample size, findings from this study cannot be generalized to the wider population, because it may not speak accurately to other Cambodians beyond the research participants themselves.

Coding

I went through two arduous rounds of coding. NVivo was used for the first attempt but not the second. For the second attempt at coding, I used a combination of hard and soft copies of Word documents. Compared to NVivo, I preferred using hard and soft copies. It felt more natural, and that was important because it enabled me to go back and forth from page to page with a natural flow. It did not feel forced and rigid, which was the case when I used NVivo.

The second attempt at coding went much deeper into the data, in part because of that natural factor; in other parts because coding that way was more familiar. The ability to create tables in Word enabled me to go back and forth between transcripts in a way that lent itself to constant comparison. I could move smoothly from one interview data to the next and back again, flipping through transcripts in no particular order. The ability to do that comfortably made it easier for me to see relationships emerge from different

respondents. The ability to physically hold pages in my hand may have helped further trigger the analytical part of my brain in a way that may not have been afforded while staring into my computer screen using NVivo.

I tried these coding procedures as a way of getting to themes, which were helpful because they enabled me to break down large chunks of data into cogent phrases. These procedures still would make sense even with a considerably larger corpus of data, because the process of going back and forth between interview data was seemingly thorough, structured, and rigorous.

Constant Comparison

There were also challenges in using constant comparison. I used constant comparison as a method to jointly code and analyze data. The joint process of coding and analyzing was useful to the extent that it compelled me to go back and forth between interviews to determine which themes had emerged from the process. That process was extremely rigorous and time consuming. This was particularly true in comparison to previous qualitative coding experiences, in which constant comparison was not used. Rather, I used a simple, straight-forward process of coding one interview and then moving on to the next only to come back to all interviews to determine which themes had emerged.

The rigor of constant comparison was extremely useful for this study, especially given the fact that I was the only person coding and analyzing – though member checking had been provided to each respondent, as a way to determine trustworthiness of data and findings. Thus, the rigor of going back and forth between interviews enabled me to thoroughly analyze the data in a way that was more practical for individuals conducting

research alone, as opposed to having co-researchers. However, I can see how some researchers may find constant comparison tedious, if at all helpful, in part given the fact that the method leaves ample room for analysis paralysis. That is not to suggest that qualitative researchers should not engage in deep analysis of the data, but rather that the process creates a wide open space for multiple researchers to mull over data that, at some point, can become redundant, if not superfluous. Even working alone, it felt like the process of constantly comparing data was paralyzing. That process could be more challenging with a team of multiple researchers, and even more so working with difficult personalities. That could stall the entire process, given a stubborn approach to coding and analysis. But, with that said, coding data alone was difficult at times. So much information was being processed, and indeed stored, in my head. It would have been useful to have a co-researcher with whom to analyze said information. Perhaps the intellectual process of making meaning would not have seemed so overwhelming.

Short Timeframe

Another noticeable limitation was that the short timeframe cannot capture the events that may transpire after completing the research study. Certain aspects of the respondent's life could have changed. Those changes could arguably inform the findings of this dissertation research in a small or large way. That is, human relationships are complex and always evolving, and because of that, isolating an understanding of complex human interactions within an arbitrary, structured timeframe only catches a glimpse of their lives. That in itself has limitations, but is a necessary part of conducting empirical qualitative research.

One Geographic Space

Another possible limitation was that this study focused on a few family members living in one geographic location. Findings ultimately described a selected and unique situation that cannot be used to generalize the larger population of Cambodians living in the United States. However, it must be stated, that the primary intention of this dissertation research was to document the views of family members, in order to acquire a better understanding of their views regarding family-school partnerships.

Adults Only, Not Children

Another major limitation was that this study only documented the views of parents/guardians. It did not interview their children or Cambodian students of other family members. That had its limitations, of course, because parents/guardians and their children may all live under the same roof, but each person is shaped by his or her own unique qualities, perceptions, expectations, drive, motivation, and understanding of the world around them. As a result, only documenting the views of adults did not allow me to really know what these young people experienced inside school walls or at home and away from the watchful eyes of their guardians. This study also did not account for the perspectives of school partners. They also are key players in the partnership. Eliciting the perspectives of guardians alone was one-dimensional. However, it was my intention to select Cambodian adults, mainly because they deserve a platform to express their views and opinions.

Church Setting

One possible limitation of working in a church setting was that parents were not interviewed in an environment that was conducive to deeper discussions of family-school partnerships. Perhaps conducting interviews at church did not trigger more powerful memories and stories of times when they had worked or collaborated with school partners. That could have impacted the length and depth of their responses. Another possible limitation was that participants were joiners. One might argue that because they had joined a church, that perhaps they were more likely to join or get involved in school activities. As a result, they may have been more optimistic about their views of family-school partnerships. That may have been a limitation to the extent that it may have prevented them from being more critical of partnerships, which could have elicited new, insightful views to help strengthen existing partnerships beyond what was shared. Another possible limitation was that participants, perhaps in the presence of "God," may have felt less inclined to discuss controversial matters that may have portrayed them as unkind or ungrateful.

Ethnic Cambodian Researcher

There also were challenges that arose because of my ethnicity and identity. Some of the biggest challenges came in trying to be respectful and mindful of Cambodian families, not to mention the larger Cambodian community. There were so many instances in which I decided not to do something because I was culturally aware of how that may have been portrayed and perceived, typically as disrespectful to families. And while that could be a figment of my imagination, the fact that I was hypersensitive about

the situation was, in and of itself, a challenge and limitation. Again, the idea of being "too pushy" or "overly opportunistic" in asking people to join the study or in asking interview questions come to mind.

I wanted to "get to know" families in a way that was not perceived as superficial, by either them or me. That level of cultural sensitivity may have been a disadvantage. Stated previously, the main goal of using the church community was to have the space and time to build rapport with respondents, over the eight month period. I thought, and still believe, that it would have been disrespectful and culturally unfit to identify random people, walk into their lives, ask questions, collect data, and then leave. Not having that level of cultural hypersensitivity may have enabled me to blithely select parents to participate without the need to build rapport.

On some level, one might argue that non-Cambodian researchers, or Cambodian researchers who are not overly sensitive about these issues can cross into this cultural boundary, collect all the data they want, and then leave. They may do so in a way that may seem culturally disrespectful, like unloading tons of personal questions. Cambodians, and to an extent Asians, tend to say that "Americans" or "Westerners" are more open and transparent, not only about their feelings, but also about their personal lives, as compared to Cambodians or Asians. And, as someone who is both Cambodian and American, there may be some truth to that. Challenges also came from the fact that I have a bitter taste in my mouth given the Khmer Rouge genocide, and how it continues to plague Cambodian communities in the US. That history is indelibly etched into our stories, and is often difficult to separate from it. Indeed, I am culturally hypersensitive

because of that history, in addition to the continued struggles and sufferings of the Cambodian people.

But there were other challenges. That I was “Cambodian American” helped to the extent that it gave me access to the pastor, the proverbial gatekeeper of the research setting. However, there was reason to believe that well-respected Cambodian community leaders would have been trusted perhaps more easily. Families may have been more willing to talk to them about their stories, both good and bad. Church members may have been turned off by the fact that I was a government employee. They may have thought that I was collecting public information about their families, which could later be reported to the government – an entity not often trusted by Cambodian families.

In conclusion, many limitations impacted this study negatively. Not having access to stronger data was a huge disappointment, to be sure. I have spent countless hours, over many years, beating myself up over this dissertation. At some point, however, we have to dust ourselves off and learn from our mistakes. Indeed, I believe that I am a much stronger researcher today, than I was seven years ago when I started this process. There is something to be said about the process of learning, using what we have acquired to do things better next time around.

Also, there is something to be said about working a demanding full-time job, while equally meeting the demands of a rigorous doctoral program. I am sure that having to work to make ends meet financially took away from my ability to focus intently on the dissertation. I only wish that I was afforded the privilege, and indeed luxury, to be a traditional full-time student, but that has never been my reality, even as a full-time student in college. In the end, however, we must learn to celebrate whatever small

contributions we have made. Though small, I believe that I have made positive contributions to society with this dissertation.

Future Research

One is encouraged to explore two potential areas of research. One might explore how to develop cultural competency among teachers and Cambodian families. One might also explore effective practices for families to support their children at home.

Develop Cultural Competency among Teachers and Families

Future researchers might explore the notion of cultural competency in the context of Cambodian Americans and school-community partnerships. For example, how can teachers develop cultural competency to better support ethnic minority Cambodian students and families? Researchers might be interested in exploring how K-12 curriculum and lessons can be improved and strengthened to incorporate content that speaks to the historical, political, social, and economic trends and patterns of Cambodian families in the United States. How do newcomer trends and patterns impact learning for young Cambodians at school? How can school personnel achieve a better understanding of the culture and experiences of Cambodian families? How can these experiences be a resource in the school curriculum?

In terms of how teachers can develop cultural competency, researchers might think about how to incorporate cultural competency lessons into teacher preparation programs at the beginning of the school year, especially for new teachers. Researchers might also want to explore how veteran teachers can have professional development opportunities to learn or strengthen cultural competency, while also serving as mentors

for new teachers. Researchers may explore culturally appropriate programs to help families learn about American cultural norms and values. These programs may help Cambodian families better understand cultural differences, in interacting with teachers and their own children. Overcoming such cultural barriers may help to strengthen relationships between families and teachers.

Explore Effective Practices to Support Families at Home

Future researchers might explore effective practices to support Cambodian families at home. It may be useful to identify Cambodian students with strong grade point averages (GPAs) and perhaps from low-income backgrounds. Researchers can explore what being academically successful means to these families. Is it enough that students graduate from high school? Is success determined by college completion? What are Cambodian parents doing at home that they see as possible?

In terms of new ideas, one might explore the idea of family-school partnerships from the perspectives of dropouts and their families. Also, researchers might think about further disaggregating data for Cambodians, and compare findings within the community and across other AAPI groups.

Explore Family-School Partnerships from the Perspectives of Dropouts

Researchers may explore the views of family-school partnerships from the perspectives of high school and college dropouts and their families. What would these students and families say about the role of family-school connections, particularly in light of the challenges they currently face? My dissertation examined families that were somewhat "successful," in part because children were either in school or had already

graduated from high school and college. It would be interesting, therefore, to see whether or not the families of dropouts would view family-school partnerships the same way, one that was arguably more positive in my study. How would they view the ways in which families and school partners can work together in order to optimize learning? Researchers should not only talk to families, but they ought to elicit the views of dropouts themselves. Young people often are caught between the American and Cambodian culture, and may have interesting views to share. Researchers should talk to different school and community partners in order to get a somewhat complete view of the issue. While giving voice to Cambodian adults can be powerful, there are clear limitations from a research perspective.

Given what I have now learned about research, I encourage researchers to use different research methods beyond interviews. Going a step beyond my study, researchers could utilize on-line and paper-based surveys. One is cautioned not to over think the idea of trust-building in working with the Cambodian community; though be mindful of not overstepping and/or disrespecting cultural boundaries. In conducting surveys, find participants throughout the US, namely in cities like Lowell and Long Beach with higher concentrations of Cambodian families. The rationale here is that these communities may be more knowledgeable and better equipped at connecting families and schools, and more specifically in finding interventions that reach out to dropouts. Data from these communities, working with such partners, are likely to be broad and rich.

Lastly, researchers should identify a few families from the survey and conduct case studies. This is one way to access rich data, and one can build trust with families

along the way. These case studies ought to capture who these people are in their natural habitat, because this may be where they feel most comfortable sharing their life stories.

Further Disaggregate Data for Cambodians

This dissertation explored a microcosm of the many and varied lived experiences of the Cambodian people. As researchers, there is still so much we do not know. Future research ought to explore the idea of family-school partnerships, perhaps on a much larger scale. A longitudinal study of Cambodian families, working across socioeconomic lines, is long overdue. Researchers should investigate how Cambodian families are doing across generations. At least three generations of Cambodians have been in the US. Their lived experiences have not yet been fully documented, especially in the context of home-school connections, and how these partnerships can be leveraged and/or modified to better support Cambodian families.

Researchers across disciplines – Education, Social Sciences, Health, Medicine, Law, etc. – ought to collaborate, in order to investigate these issues through multiple lenses. The rationale here is that there are multiple dimensions to the whole child, and as such, multiple lenses are needed for a full and complete assessment of these people. Exploring issues through one lens has limitations. One only captures a sliver of their lives. Findings from these studies may be utilized to compare and contrast different Cambodian families across the US. Findings from Cambodian families may also be utilized to compare across other Southeast Asian groups, which supports the larger effort to disaggregate data for the AAPI community.

Practical Applications of Findings

There are some practical applications of these findings. Findings from this study can be utilized to support Cambodian families, schools, and community partners working together to think about how, and to what extent, communication can be improved between families and teachers. Going deeper, community-based organizations can organize opportunities for Cambodian parents to come together with other parents to discuss how to improve communication between parents and teachers. What challenges have they faced in the past in reaching out to teachers? Why did parents not contact teachers in the past, if that was indeed the case? Where there are success stories, what strategies can Cambodian parents share with other parents in their own experiences of communicating effectively with teachers, so that other parents can be more successful in strengthening that partnership with school partners?

In particular, community-based organizations can use findings from this study to think, or re-think, about how Cambodian parents understand the meaning of family-school partnerships, as programs are developed to support young Cambodians at school, at home, and in the community. Why did participants in my study talk about "addressing problems" in thinking about what family-school partnerships meant? Is this new information to community organizations serving Cambodian families, or have they heard similar stories in their own communities? If these stories are not new, what can we do to get parents to think about family-school partnerships beyond addressing problems? How can we better engage teachers to get involved in these discussions, perhaps beyond school

hours and school walls? Perhaps they can have discussions in the community where Cambodian families may feel more comfortable sharing information.

Bringing young people into the discussions, what do they think about their parents' involvement in their schooling experiences? In their view, what can parents do more effectively in order to engage teachers? And what do they think teachers can do more effectively in supporting their parents in this process?

These practical applications are likely to help key stakeholders (i.e., parents, children, teachers, and community partners) to better engage in discussions around communication, what that means, and how to get parents thinking beyond "addressing problems" in the context of strengthening family-school partnerships. In the end, young people should be able to reach their fullest potential, in and out of school.

Epilogue

This Epilogue is a personal reflection. It is an initiation of my thinking to do the learning that would add substance to the work. One might argue that, in the absence of more extensive or rich data, one can still add learning to explain the process of what was gained. The question, then, becomes: If I were to do it all over again, what would I do differently, based on what I know now? How would I design the study to address how my first attempt fell down?

First, in finding Cambodian-American families to participate, I would go directly to community-based advocacy groups, school counselors, and teachers with significant experience working directly with at-risk Cambodian youths and families, including high school dropouts, pregnant teens, and gang members. I would collect data directly in

Long Beach, CA or Lowell, MA, with high concentrations of Cambodian Americans. In addition to at-risk youths/families, I would want to speak with youths and families who are relatively more academically successful, if not gifted, within these communities. I might learn about effective parenting practices used to support academically successful students, and how such practices could be shared with parents whose children may be struggling at school. To triangulate data, I also would want to speak with teachers, counselors, and community partners serving these students, and to review public documents on family-school partnerships to identify emerging trends in the field, and how that impacts newly arrived Americans.

Second, I would utilize different types of methods which are explained below.

Observations of Family Events

Once people have been identified for the study, and I have chosen families to study more closely as case studies, I would focus on how parents interact with their children at home. I would also pay attention to how youths interact with their peers outside of home, which includes peers at school. I would also want to observe study participants in large gatherings that are popular in the Cambodian community: Cambodian Buddhist Holidays and Cambodian political party rallies. Though infrequent, Buddhist Holidays bring hundreds of Cambodians together under one roof, as they pay homage to their ancestors. Political rallies often are big, lively affairs for Cambodian families, especially when a Cambodian politician visits the United States.

Design Ethnographic Interview Schedule

I would also design an ethnographic interview schedule that provides multiple opportunities to collect data from study participants. To help people talk, I would use artifacts, asking them to bring something meaningful and tell stories about that. It could be a photo of when they first arrived to the United States as Cambodian refugees. It could be a trophy won by their children, or the first dollar they ever earned in the United States. It could also be a family heirloom (e.g., jewelry or clothing) passed down from generation to generation, and what holding on to that heirloom despite the genocide and resettlement in the United States means to them.

Focus Groups

Another way to collect data would be to conduct focus groups. The purpose of focus groups is to see how these individuals interact with each other in a group dynamic. It helps to see how they may respond to certain questions or probes, not as individuals, but as a collective unit. Some adults and youths may be more inclined to speak up when they see other people doing the same. This may not necessarily be the case during private one-on-one interviews.

Third, in terms of intellectual skills, I feel more comfortable now asking pointed questions and finding opportunities that get at the heart of the problem, controversial or not. Putting aside my own cultural biases – of being Cambodian, and therefore reluctant to invade private space – I feel very comfortable today approaching Cambodian families and community members, and would find opportunities that would allow me to enter their lives.

Fourth, I am now thinking more broadly about issues that impact this community. While more research and literature – and indeed practice and policy – ought to better find ways to connect these families and schools to culturally- and ethnically-relevant family-school partnerships, I also recognize how limiting this topic can be. It is difficult enough to get mainstream America to listen to Southeast Asian voices; addressing a more nuanced topic like partnerships makes it that much harder to be heard. It is, therefore, more effective to broaden my research/practical interests to include things that are often of greater relevance to mainstream America: high school dropout crises and graduation; summer learning opportunities; education/workforce skills development; and cradle-to-college and career strategies. To give these families voice, and to make that voice heard at all levels of society, I realize now that we have to start at baseline: talk about everyday issues of resilience in the face of mounting obstacles in the United States, and what that portends for both adults and youths.

In this context, I would find ways to access real stories of resilience and how families could survive at all in the United States. Given the impact of the Cambodian genocide on their lives, in addition to stories of resilience in the face of poverty, school failure, gang violence, and unemployment in the United States, these stories are likely to provide rich data. I would focus on acquiring community-based knowledge of resilience, and how that knowledge can be the basis for collective action, which of course includes strengthening and deepening family-school partnerships especially for highly at-risk, troubled Cambodian/Southeast Asian youths and families.

In terms of resilience, I would like to explore what types of practices are used by adults/parents to overcome challenges, and how they think they may transfer that

knowledge, cultural or otherwise, to their children in order to help them in or out of school. I would like to explore why they feel the need to persevere despite multiple challenges. For those who have lost their ability to persevere, I would like to know why and how that choice may impact how their own children have made sense of their world in the United States at home or school. I would also like to explore how youths view the presence or absence of their parent's resilience, and the implications it may have on their own lives.

On some level, I understand the intricate balance between raising awareness around a particular topic (in this case Cambodian-American family-school partnerships), and what it takes to change mindsets without necessarily preaching to the choir. It may be more effective to focus on people who may be unaware of the issues, or who still do not care about the challenges of being Cambodian/Southeast Asian in today's America. Why do Cambodian Americans continue to have the highest high school dropout and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) rates in the United States, yet no-one barely even notices? Much of the policy and political limelight is fixated elsewhere. These facts, and other related challenges of the Cambodian-American people, are captured quite clearly in the 2014 PBS documentary: *America by the Numbers: Pass or Fail in Cambodia Town.*[1]

Fifth, what I also learned from this experience is that it takes collective impact, connecting networks and sharing resources among like-minded change agents to get messages across. This, to be sure, was a big learning lesson for me. It only has made me stronger and more effective as a researcher/change agent. I have very unique skills to leverage that I can share with members of the Cambodian/Southeast Asian community. And while this dissertation did not achieve stronger results – through rich data – the fact

[1] For more information, see http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/america-by-the-numbers/episodes/episode-106/.

is that the Cambodian/Southeast Asian refugee community is still fairly new to the United States, and there is still more to learn. But there is also a great deal of knowledge that we can share with the general public. Some of that knowledge includes the important work of activist-scholars like Peter Kiang who has played a monumental role in challenging existing American K-12 curricula to include the culture and history of Cambodian Americans. These newcomer voices may help students to better understand who Cambodians are and the challenges and issues they face. Historical and cultural materials may also help teachers in becoming more culturally competent, particularly as they work with Cambodian students. I would like to support such efforts to improve American K-12 curricula.

Sixth, what I also have learned is this: when it comes to issues of social justice, it is a moral imperative to choose sides. One cannot be a centrist to the extent that one "sits on the fence." One cannot wait for change to slowly happen in order to avoid being overly risky or somewhat controversial. This is particularly true when there is social injustice happening right before us. I was admittedly a centrist in taking on this dissertation, and this still is something relatively difficult to admit. Though family-school partnership is an important topic, I approached it in a way that was not risky. I should have entered the lives of troubled Cambodian teens, speaking directly with their parents to learn about why young people are struggling, and what types of interventions could be most effective in helping them.

Seventh, I would explore the role other institutions may have in supporting education in schools and families. For example, it may help to explore cultural artifacts at a museum. These artifacts might be able to tell stories about the history and current

challenges of the Cambodian people in the United States. It may help for teachers, students, and Cambodian parents to have conversations around selected, culturally relevant artwork (e.g., paintings) inspired by the genocide. They may find solidarity through these stories of pain and resilience. Other artwork (e.g., music and tapestry) that depicts stories of resettlement may also help to prompt conversations.

A Message to Future Researchers

I want to take this opportunity to speak directly to future researchers interested in this work. First and foremost: be bold; be fearless. Though mainstream America, including other ethnic minority groups (including those within the Asian-American community) fighting for social justice for non-Asian groups, may not quite understand the significance of raising awareness for the Cambodian/Southeast Asian-American community right now, push forward with this very important research agenda. Avoid being despaired by the continued lack of awareness, if not concern or ignorance, around these larger issues that continue to cast young ethnic minority Southeast Asian/Asian boys and girls of color in the shadows, on the sidelines. This research agenda is important, and as long as you know that, move forward. You have to first be brave and courageous in making your own voice heard, before having the capacity and fortitude to make other marginalized voices heard.

Second, learn to put your own biases and idiosyncrasies aside as a researcher. Learning to do this first, and well, would save you much headache and heartache as you attempt to collect data to support your research questions. Indeed, one of my biggest regrets in completing this dissertation was figuring this out at the other end of the pipeline, perhaps when it was a tad bit too late. But, of course, this was a powerful

learning lesson for me. I have grown significantly as a person and researcher because of this important work.

Third, find more than one cultural broker who can help you connect to potential participants in the community. It could be a huge risk to rely solely on one "gatekeeper" as this certainly has its limitations. If one broker does not work out, or as well as you would like, you would have other people/connectors who can put you in touch with members of the community.

In closing, this dissertation has helped me find bass in my own voice, which in itself is a powerful learning lesson. I can now speak up and fight for social justice without fear or reservation. And, for that, this part of the journey was worth it.

REFERENCES

Alliance for Excellent Education. (2011). *The High Cost of High School Dropouts: What the Nation Pays for Inadequate High Schools.* Retrieved August 1, 2014, from http://all4ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/HighCost.pdf.

AsianWeek. (2008, September 9). *Magnet Schools Mirror Myths*. Retrieved from http://www.asianweek.com/2008/09/09/magnet-schools-mirror-myths/.

Aung, K. M., & Yu, N. (2007). Does the System Work for Cambodian American Students? The Educational Experiences and Demographics of Cambodians in Lowell, Massachusetts. In T. Pho, J. N. Gerson, & S. R. Cowan (Eds.), *Southeast Asian Refugees and Immigrants in the Mill City* (pp. 88-111). Burlington, VT: University of Vermont Press.

Bankston, C. L. (2009). *Cambodian Americans*. Retrieved from http://www.everyculture.com/multi/Bu-Dr/Cambodian-Americans.html.

Barlow, D. (2001). Real Family Values. *Education Digest*, 66(8), 42-45.

Catsambis, S. (1998). *Expanding Knowledge of Parental Involvement in Secondary Education – Effects on High School Academic Success.* Baltimore, MD: CRESPAR (Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk), from http://www.csos.jhu.edu/crespar/techReports/Report27.pdf

Chandler, D. (2000). *A History of Cambodia –Third Edition*. Boulder: Westview Press.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research Methods in Education (6th edition)*. London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

Coleman, J. S. (1990). Relations of Trust. *Foundations of Social Theory* (pp. 91-118). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Corona, R., Stevens, L., Halfond, R., Shaffer, C., Reid-Quiñones, K., & Gonzalez, T. (2012). A Qualitative Analysis of What Latino Parents and Adolescents Think and Feel About Language Brokering. *Journal Of Child & Family Studies*, 21(5), 788-798.

Cremin, L.A. (1974). The Family as Educator: Some Comments on the Recent Historiography. *Teachers College Record*, 76(2), 250-265.

Dillon, S. (2009, October 8). Study Finds High Rate of Imprisonment Among Dropouts. *The New York Times*. Retrived August 4, 2014, from http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/09/education/09dropout.html?_r=0

Epstein, J. L. (1995). School/family/community partnerships: for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76, 701-712.

Epstein, J. L. (2001a). Building Bridges of Home, Family, and Community: The Importance of Design. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 6(1/2), 161-168.

Epstein, J. L. (2001b). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Boulder, CO: Westview.

Epstein, J. L. (2008). Improving Family and Community Involvement in Secondary Schools. *Education Digest*, 73(6): 9-12.

Epstein, J. L., & Jansorn, N. R. (2004). School, Family, and Community Partnerships Link the Plan. *Education Digest*, 69(6), 19-23.

Epstein, J. L., & Salinas, K. C. (2004). Partnering with Families and Communities. *Educational Leadership*, 61(8), 12-17.

Epstein, J. L., & Voorhis, F. (2010). School Counselors' Roles in Developing Partnerships with Families and Communities for Student Success. *Professional School Counseling*, 14(1), 1-14.

Fuligni, A. J. (2001). Family obligation and the academic motivation of adolescents from Asian, Latin American, and European backgrounds. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 2001(94), 61-75.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: strategies for qualitative research*. New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction.

Goldenberg, C. (1987). Low income Hispanic parents' contribution to their first-grade children's word-recognition skills. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly,* 18(3): 149–179.

Goodwin, A. L. (2010). Curriculum as colonizer: (Asian) American education in the current context. *Teachers College Record*, 112(12), 3102-3138.

Henderson, A. T., & Mapp, K. L. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement.* Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Henderson, A. T., Mapp, K. L., Johnson, V. R., & Davies, D. (2007). *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships*. New York and London: The New Press.

Hill, N. E. (2001). Parenting and academic socialization as they relate to school readiness: The role of ethnicity and school income. *Journal of Educational Psychology,* 93(4), 686–697.

Hinton, A. L. (ed.). (2002). A Head for an Eye: Revenge in the Cambodian Genocide. In *Genocide: An Anthropological Reader*. Malden: Blackwell Publishers.

Kao, G., and Tienda, M. (1995). Optimism and achievement: The educational performance of immigrant youth. *Social Science Quarterly,* 76(1), 1–19.

Kiang, P. N. (2004a). Checking Southeast Asian American Realities in Pan-Asian American Agendas. *AAPI Nexus: Policy, Practice and Community*, 2(1), 48-76.

Kiang, P. N. (2004b). Linking strategies and interventions in Asian American Studies to K–12 classrooms and teacher preparation. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 17(2), 199-225.

Kiernan, B. (1996). *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-79.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Leichter, H. J. (1974). *The Family as Educator: Some Perspectives on the Family as Educator*, (pp. 1-43). New York: Teachers College Press.

Leichter, H.J. (1997). Learning From Families. In R.L. Sinclair & W.J. Ghory (Eds.), *Reaching and Teaching All Children: Grassroots Efforts That Work* (pp. 61-83). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

Lopez, G. (2001). *On Whose Terms?: Understanding Involvement through the Eyes of Migrant Parents*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Seattle, WA.

Moll, L.C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of Knowledge for Teaching: Using a Qualitative Approach to Connect Homes and Classrooms. *Theory Into Practice*, Volume XXXI(2), 132-141.

Nakkula, M. J., & Pineda, C. G. (2005). Students at-risk. In S. J. Farenga, B. A. Joyce & D. Ness (Eds.), *Encyclopedia on education and human development* (Vol. 2, pp. 389-428). Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc.

National Coalition of Advocates for Students (NCAS). (2000). *Capacity Building for Southeast Asian Family-School Partnerships*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.

National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education (CARE). (2010). *Federal Higher Education Policy Priorities and the Asian American and Pacific Islander Community*. Retrieved August 1, 2014, from http://apiasf.org/CAREreport/2010_CARE_report.pdf

National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education (CARE). (2011). *The Relevance of Asian Americans & Pacific Islanders in the College Completion Agenda*. Retrieved August 1, 2014, from http://apiasf.org/research/2011_CARE_Report.pdf.

Niedzwiecki, M., & Duong, T. C. (2004). *Southeast Asian American Statistical Profile*. Washington, DC: Southeast Asia Resource Action Center.

Okagaki, L., Frensch, P. A., & Gordon, E. W. (1995). Encouraging school achievement in Mexican American children. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 17(2), 160-179.

Parker, S., Greer, S., & Zuckerman, B. (1988). The impact of poverty on early child development. *Pediatric Clinics of North America,* 35(6), 1-14.

Paulson, S. E. (1994). Relations of parenting style and parental involvement with ninth-Grade students' achievement. *Journal of Early Adolescence,* 14(2), 250–267.

Pho, T. (2007). Family Education and Academic Performance among Southeast Asian Students. In T. Pho, J. N. Gerson, & S. R. Cowan (Eds.), *Southeast Asian Refugees and Immigrants in the Mill City* (pp. 69- 87). Burlington, VT: University of Vermont Press.

Portes, A., & Rumbaut, R. G. (2001). *Legacies: the story of the immigrant second generation*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: The University of California Press.

Renteln, A.D. (2010). Corporal Punishment and the Cultural Defense. *Law & Contemporary Problems*, 73(2), 253-279.

Sandoval, N. I. (2007). *Bridging generations: American Indian family perceptions of home/school partnerships*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara.

Shawcross, W. (1987). *Sideshow: Kissenger, Nixon and the Destruction of Cambodia.* New York: Simon and Schuster.

Sheldon, S. B., & Epstein, J. L. (2002). Improving Student Behavior and School Discipline with Family and Community Involvement. *Education & Urban Society*, 35(1), 4-21.

Silva, S. S. (2001). *Cultural differences and attitudes towards parental involvement: A case study of preschool parents*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.

Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC). (2008). *By the Numbers: Using Data to Promote Civil Rights in High School Reform,* briefing Hosted by the Campaign for High School Equity. Testimony by Doua Thor, Executive Director, Southeast Asia Resource Action Center. Retrieved August 1, 2014, from http://www.highschoolequity.org/media-room/events/38-past-events/45-by-the-numbers-using-data-to-promote-civil-rights-in-high-school-reform.html#fbid=7RlSklkd_JA.

Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC). (2011). *Southeast Asian Americans at a Glance: Statistics on Southeast Asians adapted from the American Community Survey*. Washington, DC: Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC).

Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC). (2013). *Overview of Southeast Asian Educational Challenges*. Retrieved August 1, 2014, from http://www.searac.org/sites/default/files/SEARAC_Fact_Sheets_OVERVIEW_FINAL.pdf

Spera, C. (2005). A Review of the Relationship Among Parenting Practices, Parenting Styles, and Adolescent School Achievement. *Educational Psychology Review*, 17(2), 125-146.

Spradley, J. P. (1979). *The Ethnographic Interview*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group/Thomson Learning.

Stevenson, D. L., & Baker, D. P. (1987). The Family-School Relation and the Child's School Performance. *Child Development,* 58(5), 1348-1357.

Suarez-Orozco, C., & Suarez-Orozco, M. M. (2001). *Children of Immigration*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Thao, Y. J. (2003). Empowering Mong Students: Home and School Factors. *Urban Review*, 35(1), 18-42.

Tran, Q.D., Lee, S., & Khoi, S. (1996). Ethnic and Gender Differences in Parental Expectations and Life Stress. *Child & Adolescent Social Work Journal,* 13(6), 515-526.

Traub, J. (2000). What no school can do. *The New York Times*, January 16, 2000, Section 6, p. 52.

U.S. Bureau of the Census. (2012). *Educational Attainment in the United States: 2009.* Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/prod/2012pubs/p20-566.pdf

Uy, P. S. (2007). Response K-12 Education: How the American Community Survey Informs our Understanding of the Southeast Asian Community: One Teacher's Perspective. *Journal of Southeast Asian American Education & Advancement*, 3, 44-48.

Weissbourd, R. (1996). *The vulnerable child: What really hurts America's children and what we can do about it* (pp. 31-45). Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Appendix A

Interview Guide for Cambodian Families

Background

1) How long have you lived in the U.S.?

2) What has been your experience living in the U.S.?
    - Transition from Cambodia to the U.S.
    - Settling into the U.S
    - Learning English
    - Finding a job
    - Dealing/interacting with institutions of authority?
        - Governmental
        - Schools
        - Religious

3) What about your child's experience?
    - Learning English
    - Learning Khmer (Cambodian)
    - American culture
    - Khmer culture in America
    - Making friends
    - Authority with institutions
        - Governmental
        - Schools
        - Religious

4) In your view, what kinds of preparation do U.S. schools emphasize?
    - Post-secondary education
    - Workforce
    - Relationships
    - Community service

Grand Tour Question

It is believed that family members educate children…

5) What does education mean to you?
    - Grades
    - Learning
    - Workforce
    - Life skills

Typical Grand Tour Question

6) When it comes to educating your child, what does family-school partnership mean to you?
    - Work with teachers
    - Parent-Teacher Conference
    - Afterschool/Out-of-school time involvement
    - Volunteer
    - Cultural sensitivity

Mini-Tour Question

7) What can teachers and families do together to help children at school?
    - Homework assistance
    - Grades
    - Graduation
    - Financial independence
    - Workforce
    - Family

Typical Mini-Tour Question

8) What can teachers do to encourage stronger partnerships with families?
    - Communicate
    - Cultural exchange
    - Provide information
    - Volunteer

9) What can families do to encourage stronger partnerships with teachers?
    - Communicate
    - Cultural exchange
    - Provide information
    - Volunteer

Other

10) In what way has your involvement in the church helped in preparing your child for school?
    - Relationships
    - Ideas
    - Encouragement
    - Resilience

Appendix B

Codes

THEME1
1) Building Family-School Partnerships through Communication

PATTERNS

a) Contacting Parents about Problems *(Steve, David, Paula, Larry, Sarah, Amy)*
b) Learning Culture between Families and Teachers *(Steve, David, Larry)*

THEME2
2) Supporting Children with Schoolwork at Home and School

Open Coding - create tentative labels for chunks of data that summarize what you see happening
Axial Coding - identify relationships among the open codes
Selective Coding – identify core variable that includes all of the data

Open Codes	**Axial Codes**	**Selective Code**
1. *Having good connection* 2. *Talking to teachers about problems* 3. *Knowing what is taught* 4. *Learning both cultures* 5. *Using different ways to reach out* 6. *Doing good job if passing class* 7. *Adopting the American culture* 8. *Serving as extra pair of eyes* 9. *Talking to teachers shows care* 10. *Providing safe environment* 11. *Appreciating Cambodian culture*	Connecting between families and schools to support children 1. *Having good connection* 2. *Talking to teachers about problems* 3. *Knowing what is taught* 4. *Using different ways to reach out* 5. *Talking to teachers shows care* 6. *Visiting schools about problems* 7. *Getting to know teachers in person* 8. *Getting involved in different ways* 9. *Checking progress with schools* 10. *Monitoring homework*	Working together to support young people at home and school, especially by addressing problems and learning about culture

12. Keeping children safe *13. Wanting straight answer about helping* *14. Visiting schools about problems* *15. Supporting corporal punishment* *16. Disrespecting teachers* *17. Getting to know teachers in person* 18. *Getting involved in different ways* *19. Checking progress with schools* *20. Accessing resources for students* *21. Taking corrective action* *22. Asking about goals* *23. Monitoring homework completion* *24. Giving children high hope* *25. Advising children sufficient for busy parents* *26. Identifying weaknesses with children* *27. Tutoring children with homework* *28. Using parent-teacher conferences* *29. Meeting once a week at school* *30. Working harder than teachers* *31. Making commitment to work together* *32. Communicating to discuss progress* *33. Contacting parents with information* 34. *Lacking English proficiency*	*completion* *11. Identifying weaknesses with children* *12. Tutoring children with homework* *13. Using parent-teacher conferences* *14. Meeting once a week at school* *15. Working harder than teachers* *16. Making commitment to work together* *17. Communicating to discuss progress* *18. Lacking English proficiency* *19. Preferring PTA meetings* *20. Inviting oneself into groups* *21. Attending every school meeting* *22. Supporting teachers anywhere* Working with parents to address problems at school *23. Serving as extra pair of eyes* *24. Wanting straight answer about helping* *25. Accessing resources for students* *26. Asking about goals* *27. Contacting parents with information* *28. Knowing community leader* *29. Accessing resources about communities* *30. Advising parents on helping children* *31. Telling families what needs done*	

35. *Knowing community leader* 36. *Accessing resources about communities* 37. *Preferring PTA meetings* 38. *Devoting time for students* 39. *Showing students love* 40. *Spending school time with children* 41. *Inspiring children to learn* 42. *Teaching children discipline* 43. *Developing good work ethic* 44. *Advising parents on helping children* 45. *Doing anything necessary* 46. *Learning about culture* 47. *Spanking without hurting badly* 48. *Giving students confidence* 49. *Inviting oneself into groups* 50. *Telling families what needs done* 51. *Supporting teachers anywhere* 52. *Supplementing what is taught at school* 53. *Engaging student learning* 54. *Attending every school meeting* 55. *Standing on own two feet* 56. *Teasing is bad* 57. *Imposing traditional Cambodian values* 58. *Teaching children respect*	Respecting culture to better comprehend families and schools 32. *Learning both cultures* 33. *Adopting the American culture* 34. *Appreciating Cambodian culture* 35. *Supporting corporal punishment* 36. *Learning about culture* 37. *Spanking without hurting badly* 38. *Imposing traditional Cambodian values* Supporting young people at home to be successful at school 39. *Doing good job if passing class* 40. *Providing safe environment* 41. *Keeping children safe* 42. *Disrespecting teachers* 43. *Taking corrective action* 44. *Giving children high hope* 45. *Advising children sufficient for busy parents* 46. *Devoting time for students* 47. *Showing students love* 48. *Spending school time with children* 49. *Inspiring children to learn* 50. *Teaching children discipline* 51. *Developing good work ethic* 52. *Doing anything necessary* 53. *Giving students*	

59. *Encouraging learning outside of school* 60. *Setting realistic expectations* 61. *Role modeling for children* 62. *Becoming self-sufficient* 63. *Teaching students discipline* 64. *Encouraging importance of reading* 65. *Role modeling from own parents* 66. *Teaching children values*	*confidence* 54. *Engaging student learning* 55. *Standing on own two feet* 56. *Teasing is bad* 57. *Teaching children respect* 58. *Setting realistic expectations* 59. *Role modeling for children* 60. *Becoming self-sufficient* 61. *Teaching students discipline* 62. *Encouraging importance of reading* 63. *Role modeling from own parents* 64. *Teaching children values* 65. *Supplementing what is taught at school* 66. *Encouraging learning outside of school*	

Appendix C

Short Background Survey for Respondents

Name: ____

Phone #:_______________________________________

Your highest level of education completed? (Please circle one)

- Elementary (K-5)
- Middle School (6-8)
- High School (9-12)
- College
- Other__________________________
- None

Were you educated in the US? (Please circle one)

- Yes
- No (where?______________________________)

How many people live in your home/apartment?____________________

Number of children in your family?____________________

How many children attended school in the US?______________________

Number of children currently in school?____________________

Do you wish to participate in this study? (Circle one)

- Yes
- No
- Maybe, but I need more information

* Please place this survey in the envelope provided to you. Seal the envelope, and place the envelope in the collection box on your way out. You may also choose NOT to place the envelope in the collection box. It is up to you. Thanks for your time.

Appendix D

Informed Consent Form

TEACHERS COLLEGE
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
525 West 120th Street
New York, NY 10027
(212) 678-3000

INFORMED CONSENT

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH: You are invited to participate in a research study on family involvement in education. The purpose of the study is to understand the views of Cambodian American family members on family-school partnerships, and how those partnerships can be used to help Cambodian children succeed academically.

You will be asked to give your views on family involvement in your child's education at home and in school. I will use a digital recorder to record the interview in order to help me with the transcription. The transcription refers to writing down everything that was said during the interview, after the interview has been conducted. The transcription is necessary because it will help me to remember everything that was said, in addition to helping with the analysis of the data. I will immediately delete the interviews and the transcription once the dissertation has been defended. However, your data will be stored in a password-protected computer until that time, to which I alone have access. The research will be conducted by the researcher, Peter Tan Keo, and interviews will be conducted at a specified location to accommodate your schedule and privacy. That location could be at your place of residence, my place of residence, a public place (e.g., coffee house, park bench, etc.), or at the church, wherever you feel most comfortable giving the interview.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: There are possible risks and benefits associated with this study.

Risks:

- Risks in this study are minimal. It is unlikely that any information collected from you could be used negatively against you, as all identifying information will be removed. For example, I will replace your real name with a made-up name (or, pseudonym). This is intended to protect your privacy and identity. Still, given that this is a small study specifically of Cambodian family involvement in

education, the interview material could be attributed to a relatively small group of individuals. Specific identification to you by others is unlikely but possible.
- In addition, you might feel uncomfortable sitting in one place for approximately 45-90 minutes to answer interview questions. You could get up and walk around or stretch during the interview. I can also break up the interview into smaller segments, across different days, upon your request.
- You will be asked to talk about private family issues related to family involvement. You may be uncomfortable answering certain questions. If you are, I can stop the interview recording at any time, upon your request. If you wish to ignore any part of the question altogether, you will not have to answer that question, and we can move on to the next questions. If you become really distressed during or after the interview, I can refer you to a counselor/mental health professional.
-

Benefits:
There are some benefits that may be possible from this research. However, there are no direct benefits. Some of the possible benefits include the following:

- You could think about your views of family involvement in a systematic manner.
- You could have time to talk about these issues with a trained researcher.
- You could have more conversations with your children regarding school-related matters.
- You could be motivated to talk to school partners about being more or less involved in your child's education.

PAYMENTS: There are no reimbursements for your participation in this study.

DATA STORAGE TO PROTECT CONFIDENTIALITY: You will be asked to sign an informed consent form in order to document approval for participating in the study. I will also issue a pseudonym for you and for the research setting. Each informant will have a different pseudonym and the research setting will have its own pseudonym.

Interviews will be taped using a digital recorder. Interviews will be transcribed and coded onto a Word document using my home computer to which I alone have access. The computer is also password protected to safeguard any information stored on the computer. All documents will be kept electronically on a Word document. I will destroy all materials once the dissertation has been defended.

TIME INVOLVEMENT: Your participation will take approximately one to two days. That is, you may be asked to participate in a second, follow-up interview should I require clarification after the first interview has been conducted. You will be contacted in advance if a second interview is necessary. Each interview should last approximately 45-90 minutes, but it could be shorter or longer, depending on your responses.

HOW WILL RESULTS BE USED: The results of the study will be used for the principal investigator's doctoral dissertation. Results from the study may also be published in

professional journals and/or articles. There will be no way to identify you in the publication of the research data.

Teachers College, Columbia University

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

Principal Investigator:
Peter Tan Keo

Research Title:
Cambodian Perspectives of Family-School Partnerships: A grounded theory approach

- I have read and discussed the Research Description with the researcher. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the purposes and procedures regarding this study.
- My participation in research is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw from participation at any time without jeopardy to future medical care, employment, student status or other entitlements.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at his/her professional discretion.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue to participate, the investigator will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research project that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- If at any time I have any questions regarding the research or my participation, I can contact the investigator, who will answer my questions. The investigator's phone number is (323) 854-2001.
- If at any time I have comments, or concerns regarding the conduct of the research or questions about my rights as a research subject, I should contact the Teachers College, Columbia University Institutional Review Board /IRB. The phone number for the IRB is (212) 678-4105. Or, I can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY, 10027, Box 151.
- I should receive a copy of the Research Description and this Participant's Rights document.
- If video and/or audio taping is part of this research, I ( ) consent to be audio/video taped. I ( ) do NOT consent to being video/audio taped. The written, video and/or audio taped materials will be viewed only by the principal investigator.
- Written, video and/or audio taped materials ( ) may be viewed in an educational setting outside the research
  ( ) may NOT be viewed in an educational setting outside the research.
- My signature means that I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature: ________________________________ Date:____/____/____

Name: ________________________________

Investigator's Verification of Explanation

I certify that I have carefully explained the purpose and nature of this research to __________________________________ (participant's name) in age-appropriate language. He/She has had the opportunity to discuss it with me in detail. I have answered all his/her questions and he/she provided the affirmative agreement (i.e. assent) to participate in this research.

Investigator's Signature: ____

Date: ______________________

Appendix E

Transcripts

Interview 1: Steve

1) How long have you lived in the US?
-I've been here almost 29 years.

And when did you come?
-Around September 1981

2) What has been your experience living in the U.S.?
-It just uhm settling into the US. You know about refugees so, after the Khmer Rouge we just escape from Cambodia and stay at a refugee camp in Thailand. That's why we came here (US).

So, when you came to the US, when you settled into the US, can you talk a bit about that experience? How was that when you came into the US, did you come directly to Houston?
-Yeah, when I came to the US first I stay in Thailand, in a refugee camp for a couple years there and then after that I went to Indonesia we call that the "Galant Island" there, close to Singapore, and I stayed there for a few months and then I came directly to Houston.

Did you learn English at the camp, did you learn English here, back in Cambodia?
-I learned it (English) back since Cambodia but not much you know the school in Cambodia it's one hour (of learning English) a week. So and then I work with another non-profit organization in the refugee camp and also I work in a hospital and also I work with World Relief in Indonesia and as a teacher's aide over there, yeah.

Can you talk a bit about your experiences, here I say institutions of authority, but basically, you know, how the American government and working with you in helping you settle in the United States, what was that relationship like, was it okay, was it difficult because of the translation?
-Yeah, the first thing is very difficult you know by the time back in 1981 it was not easy life. You know the first come to the new country like this we have nothing, you know even myself, I only have one pant and one shirt with me, with no extra clothes. It was hard so we depend on the government helping us just for a while and then I start to work right away.

Can you talk about your involvement with the church, just very briefly, did they help you settle in?
-Yeah, the church is, you know, I became Christian since I was in the refugee camp in Thailand so I was converted there. And then, I helping at a church in Galant Island, that's in Indonesia, and when I came to Houston, also helping other church and then later on God seem calling me to be, you know, a Minister, and so I decided that, you know I following him without pay from the church.

3) What about your child's experience?
-Yeah, learning and growing is, it's not easy in this country, especially if you're from the other country and then the language is different, the culture is different and everything different so we try to adapt ourselves to, you know, adjust our lives to be, you know, feel more comfortable to both sides (US and Cambodia), and especially the kids, also it's not easy for them to be 100% in Cambodian or 100% in American. So they are learning both cultures. But gladly they're attending school here and educated (here) so they still going.

Did you encourage them to learn Cambodian at home or was it something they kind of picked up?
-Yeah, I tried one time to have Cambodian class at the church but not many parents were involved with it because they claimed that they were very busy. But my kids, I try to talk to them some Cambodian at home also. They understand but they cannot talk back much in Cambodian.

You want to talk about how they made friends. Was it easy for them as a Cambodian kid making friends or was it difficult for them?
-Yeah, I don't think there was any problem with making friends. You know, they have good friends at church and also at the school. So all my kid, they have a good relationship with friends, they have no problem.

And then with institutions, schools, government, etc, same thing?
-Yeah, it's fine.

4) In your view, what kinds of preparation do U.S. schools emphasize?
-Yeah, that's a, I think that's my preparation…school in the United States here the first thing when I got here I got GED right away and I tried to go to college but just for part-time. Also, I attended the seminary, that was related to my religion so I can be a good teacher and a good preacher.

In your view, what kind of role does education play, in your view?
-I just try to set up myself as a role model to them. To show I have to keep reading the books, and researching, and try to educate myself as much as I can to show them. And not to spend time watching TV or the other thing. Show them that what we focus on.

You think it prepares you for like, you know, the education that the kids receive, say from elementary up to high school in the United States, you think it prepares them for college or work in general?
- I just guiding them to make sure that they understand the life in this country. And especially they have to look to the future life you know how they can make themselves to be sufficient and they can help themselves and their family.

5) What does education mean to you?
- Education means a lot to me. It helping a lot how to know more about what's going on in the world and also about the life skill. Education is related to our lives and everything. The more you're interested in school and the more you're educated, a lot more you know about it. It helping.

Do you encourage your kids to get good grades or do you encourage them to learn materials so they can be prepared for the future?
- I always encouraging them to pay attention on their homework. That they got from school. And also they have to read the book to find out more and try to do more research you know whatever they can. Find resources to help them.

6) When it comes to educating your child, what does family-school partnership mean to you?
- Relationship is very important for the parent and the school. So we have to have a good connection with the school teachers and find out what's the problem with your kids and also we have to let the teacher know that anything the teacher want to know about our children then we can tell them. So, this is very important that's why we have at school they always have teacher and parents meet, at school, and that's the partnership that we have to do. So we can know what the teacher is teaching our children and what we can help them and the information that they (teachers) provide to us and what we can help our children.

And you talked about the importance of building that partnership. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit, in your view, about understanding culture between both sides. So, for example what's your view on the teachers/schools trying to understand better the Cambodian culture, and of course, the other way around, Cambodian parents trying to understand better the American culture?
- Yeah, they have to learn both. You that's why there was a problem with the first time at school, you know when the teacher saw the children, you know that usually when the children get sick they (Cambodian parents) get the coin and rub you know,

Like "Preang Krolah?"
-Yeah, Preang Krolah. And they rub it (body) to make it feel better. Teacher saw that and they called the police and asked, "what's going on?" And some problems (like that) from the beginning. That's why we have to teach them they have to know about our (Cambodian) culture. And also we have to learn from them (American teachers), you know the culture, you cannot beat the children, you cannot do anything on the children.

That's the way that we can learn from each other and also we can tell our children also about this.

I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about, I don't know if your kids were involved in any kind of activity after school or afterschool programs, once the school bell rings, were your kids involved, were they not involved?
- Yeah, they were not involved but one of my children, when they get off from school they work with the other kid after school. Helping (other kids) with homework and other things.

7) What can teachers and families do together to help children at school?
- Yeah, that's a very important thing teacher and parent they have to work closely with each other to know. And, especially, as a parent, we have to check with the school to make sure that they are attending school regularly and that they (students) do and return their homework. Also, if they have any behavior (issue) at school or anything like that we check, and what is the weakness for the kid, something that we can help the teacher will know. Sometimes the parents don't know but we have to check at school to make sure that everything is okay.

- Yeah, maybe it's very helpful for high school kids over the summer they have nothing to do, and if the teachers knows some places for them to find a job and work and help them get school supplies, keeping them away from other activities. If the teacher can help there, it would be good.

8) What can teachers do to encourage stronger partnerships with families?
- What we want teacher to do is teacher has to provide information to the parent. To let them know what's going on with your kid, either call or phone or (send) a letter and find out. That's a big thing that the teacher has to do with the parent, to get close to provide all the information to let them know what's going on with their children. That's the thing that the teacher has to do. The thing is for our Cambodian people, you know, most of them don't understand English. When the teacher call they (parents) don't know what they're talking about. When the letter comes they don't know what it is, they just throw away, or something like that. And that's the main thing for our people here. Because most of them, they non-educated and they don't know what's going on and how they can help the children. That's why, the best thing is, they (teachers) have to get to know the community or the community leader to find out, and the teacher has to know, okay, I didn't get this information, and then find out through the community, get through the community, okay, can you talk to this family because they have some kind of problem or something. Maybe they (teachers) don't understand what's going on with the children. So the teacher has a big role to communicate and to contact with the community, because they know that they (Cambodian families) are new here and they don't know much about situations in this country.

What do you think that teacher should do in order to communicate that message more clearly?

- Yeah, that's why I said that if the teacher did not get a response from the parent they might contact with the community leader to know what's going on with your (the leader's) community. And what can teachers do to help them. So when they get a response from the community they may know how they can contact the parent.

In your experience as a parent and father, if the teacher doesn't know anything about the community, how could that teacher contact the community leader?
- I think the teacher has to know because each ethnic group in this country they have to have some kind of community. And they have to find out which ethnicity they are and so they have to find out. Especially the principal and counselor at school they know because they always have a list or something. Right now they have a lot of thing they can search on and they will know. They can contact with each community leader and find out that way. Because a lot of resources are available not like before.

9) What can families do to encourage stronger partnerships with teachers?
- The thing is the parent has to cooperate with the teacher. Any letter they don't understand or whatever, they have to cooperate with it (the teacher), go and asked them or get somebody to help. If they don't speak the language then they need to find somebody who knows, because if the parent is willing to help the children they have to find somebody to help with it.

10) In what way has your involvement in the church helped in preparing your child for school?
- At the church it's helped a lot in education because we try to create a lot of activities for them. Even we try to have afterschool programs for them, and we can get somebody to help them with their homework or skill or some kind of thing that we try to do at the church. And also the church can help them to discipline them and especially to get them away from other groups like gangs. We keep all the children busy at the church, and let them focus on the thing that they are supposed to do. That helps them.

You talked about some of the afterschool programs with the church, can you tell me a little bit more about that?
- Yeah, we plan to but, maybe we can get the computer for them to have after school. They can sit down, they can learn something like that. And beside that we can teach them in Cambodian or whatever to learn their own language, and also to encourage them to learn something. The more languages you can speak the better it is for you to communicate with other people. It's a kind of encouragement.

You talked about how the church helps to discipline the kids, can you talk more about that please?
-When we discipline them, we focus on God's work and what God tells us to do. And they have to learn and they have to know that discipline it comes from God. When they believe and follow those kinds of things, then they will be a good person. They will respect their parents, respect their teachers, all kinds of people.

And you talked about how the church keeps your kids safe and away from bad outside activities, do you have any additional thoughts with that in terms of keeping your kids away from the bad things out there?

- That's why as a parent and as a church member we have to focus on our children and with the other children also. You know we try to create more activities for them to keep them around. And like summer kids have nothing to do most of the kids go with their friends and you don't know what they're doing out there. And the parents busy with work or business and they don't know what's going on until their kid is in jail and somebody calls and says your kid is in jail, so what are you going to do? That is what happens. Or the child goes somewhere and gets into an accident and somebody calls and says your kid got into an accident, or something like that. That's why we have to have some kind of committee or group that we can bring them in one place and make parents to trust that kind of thing (committee or group) and cooperate to work together for all activities so we can keep our children around.

So everything you've just said about the church, do you think that also applies to schools and school teachers?

- Yeah, even the school I know they have the summer school also but I know it's not for everybody. They can have all kinds of activities to keep them (students) away.

Interview 2 – David

1) How long have you lived in the U.S.?
- Okay, I come here to America in 1981, 1981 take away 2010, 29 years.

2) What has been your experience living in the U.S.?
- I think this is a new thing, a new life for us. We need to learn something different when we came over here. We need to learn English, the language, we need to learn how to communicate with the people. We need to looking for the job, and we looking for our belief. And finally I become Christian and I'm so blessed that I become Christian. And working, serving and raising the children and come to Baptist Church over here.

If you want to, can you talk about when you came from Cambodia to the United States?
- Well, I walked from Cambodian border north of Cambodian border to Thailand. I paid somebody to bring me. I cut across the border in the middle of the night. We walked through the jungle and they left us down there. I stayed with a Thai family for a week and then I settled in a refugee camp. And then the Thai government driven us back to Cambodia loaded us back into the bus and pushed us to get out and left us in a dangerous place in "Deng Reich" mountain, on the border of Thailand, to walk back to Cambodia. During that time I need to walk through the mine land looking for the water. A lot of people killed in front of me. I prayed to God to save my life. It took me one whole month to walk day and sometimes night 500 miles, looking for something to eat, as much as I can. Trading something precious so that I can have some food and coming looking for my parents and walking 500 miles taking one month and finally I reaching my parents and then I take my second chance to come back to the border working with United Nations with American doctor. And finally I put my application and coming to America and I came to America in 1981.

3) What about your child's experience?
- In Cambodia I was graduated from full technology engineer. My family appreciate education very much and we try to encourage my children to go to school, and all of them graduated. The oldest one get a bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice in Boston, Massachusetts, and the second one graduated from the University of Houston in Communication, and the last one still at school at UT and looks like she's a sophomore.

And, from Cambodia to here, my children working and going to school it's kind of a little bit hard for them, because all I can provide is transportation and a place for them to stay. To pay for the tuition, the book and everything is kind of hard. They drop their grade down when they got to work full time and go to school full time.

Did you encourage your kid to learn Khmer at home or to embrace the Cambodian culture at home?
- I want my kids to speak Khmer language but that's their choice. They only understand the language that we talking communicate at home, not the language that we learn at school. They cannot read and write in Cambodia. They just understand a little bit. But right now, if I go back, I should push my children a little bit and encourage, the word is encourage, my children to speak the Khmer language. But at that time I just lack of it and right now they only speak the English language. And they just understand a little bit about Khmer.

4) In your view, what kinds of preparation do U.S. schools emphasize?
- I think that I'm so blessed that I came to America because they have a good school. They have a good resource to teach the children. And they do a very good job teaching the children. And I think that even though I come to America I go to school myself. And I try to convince the counselor that she should put me in the higher grade but they test me and put me in the level I'm supposed to be. And I think I'm so proud of the school in America. They have the counselor, they have the library, they have computer, they have everything to help the student over here. And I believe that if the student fails in this country they fail everywhere.

And when you say everywhere what do you mean?
- I mean that they have everything to complete and to succeed education. And if they going to Cambodia right now, they do not have much computer, they do not have much library, they do not have much tutoring, and if they flunk, they flunk. And over here in American they try to help the student who miss the school to make up the school, to have tutoring. And so this is the best country to have everything to help the student to succeed.

And do you think the schools in the United States prepare you to go to college to work?
- I think that it's very good in America we go to school learn theory and have objective on the job training. And if they go into nursing right now, they can go to school and work part time in the hospital. I think this is the best country and a blessing country in the whole world.

It's believed that family members, like you as a father, can educate children at home?
- I think so. I do the best I can do to help my children. As long as we encourage our children to do the homework and do good at school I think it's good enough. But if they have a question to me, and if I can help, I answer them. But if not sometimes, I don't.

5) What does education mean to you?
- Education is number one for me in my family. Without education look like we have no goal for our children. And education looks like transportation. To bring one from point A to point B. Without education look like we get lost.

6) When it comes to educating your child, what does family-school partnership mean to you?
- I think that if my children have a problem at school, I think that is a good communication. They call me, they send a letter, they do something to help our children, to let me know as a father as a parent to know. Compared to Cambodia, it looks like Cambodia is a different way. If the children flunk, they flunk. You know the teacher has nothing to do with our children. I'm so blessed again that in this country that the teacher looks like they go extra mile to help the student to succeed. And I think that as long as I talk to my children " how is school going and everything" and if they say that everything is okay, and I check the grade point average and the grade each semester or something like that is good, then I think the teacher is doing a very good job.

What about after school activities for your kids, if they were involved in that or were they in student council? So, basically, did your kids participate in anything after school?
- One of my daughter participates as a cheerleader on a football team or something like that. I think it encourages the children to socialize. I think that it's good that students learn something in the world to communicate with the people. And I always tell my children that everyday they go to school that everyday they go to learn to communicate to deal with the people, to make friends, to communicate. When they have a question, go ahead and ask people. But do it in a nice way and polite way.

I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about the idea of culture, maybe how teachers can learn about the Cambodian culture better or how Cambodians can learn about the America culture better? And how that can maybe help kids in school?
- I think that I'm living in America and I've adopted the American culture. My children too they live over here. I try not to force them to go back to the Cambodian culture but I just teach them about right and wrong and to be polite because most Asians they're all very polite. And respect other people. Because sometimes whatever we appreciate and this country not appreciate we just talking to the people and communicate. Communication is number one so to communicate with each other to make friends.

7) What can teachers and families do together to help children at school?
- I think that the teacher be the partner with the family. For some students who have problems, I think that teachers can encourage work together with parents so students can know weak points strong points whatever the student needs and what they need to be corrected. Tell them the right path to go to value education. The good thing is to ask about their goals when they graduate they can find a job, at least they have a certificate to show the employer at least they have some education and something like that. I think teachers play a strong role when the student has the problem. But sometimes it looks like the student go down the right path already, sometimes they don't need the teacher's attention or anything.

8) What can teachers do to encourage stronger partnerships with families?
- I think that partnership, I do not have much problem with my children because they go to school because they do their homework they do the best they can do. And I think that teachers, I have no answer on that because I have no problems with the teachers (if the

teacher do their job and I do my job as a parent, I think there's no problem.) I never face any problem.

9) What can families do to encourage stronger partnerships with teachers?
- I heard that one of the family that had a problem the student coming home and the parent asked them to do the homework and the student don't want to do the homework and the parent said, "I'm going to spank you if you don't do that." And the student said, "if you spank me I'm going to call the police," and then the student said, "okay, go ahead and spank me!" And the parent spank them and they call the police. So I think that between teachers, it looks like a "cross-culture" because as a Cambodian family, we strictly discipline them. But in this country, if we discipline them sometimes it's against the law or something like that. But as Asians, we try to discipline them because we want them to go to the right path. But sometimes we do in the good heart but it turn out against the law. And I think that the government should understand our culture and try to help the parent to encourage the student to do their homework.

I think that's really good so let me ask a little bit more on that.

You said that the government and teachers should try to understand the culture better. Can you give me an example of how that might happen?
- I think that because of the law it's completely different from our culture, because in our culture the parent has the right to discipline the children as long as we not hurt them so bad. Because sometimes as a child we got to discipline them and tell them the right way. And sometimes they are hardhead and need to be disciplined and over here in this culture that is against the law. And even though they go to school, in Cambodia the teacher can discipline them to some extent but not to hurt our children. Over here when they spank the student it looks like it's against the law. But I think that to me in our culture the teachers looks like the parents, next to the parent is the teacher because they love their student and it seems like they treat them like someone they take care and value them too.

10) In what way has your involvement in the church helped in preparing your child for school?
- I think so. It's helped me both as a parent and it helped my children too, because when they come to church they learn God's words. And God's words are the right goal for the future because God wants them to take their best ability use all their potential to go to school, to learn, to serve the people, to serve the community, to love each other, to take care each other. I think in the church and for me too I have confidence I trust and I'm faithful to the Lord because of his words they help me to deal with this world full of turmoil a lot of problems. But God it looks like he is helping me physically, spiritually to go through all the problem. And I think that students when they come to learn and they know that God helped them and be with them and direct them the right way. And like the Bible says, the word of God is the land on their feet and the light on their path, and I think this is good. I think that I'm so blessed that I've come to America and I become Christian and help my children and love everybody. It changed me from hating people to love everybody even my enemy.

How do you think this would be different if church wasn't a part of your life?
- I think that if church wasn't a part of my life, I think I'd be a workaholic. My family is going to be a disaster because I won't take care of the family just working and get the money and care about this world only. When I die I can't bring anything it looks like a loss to me. But my children they come to learn as a Christian they learn to respect their parents they love everybody they try to get along with everybody they try to help the community. And they have someone like God whenever they have the problem they can talk to God. It looks like someone to protect them. I feel that I'm so blessed that my children become Christian.

And you said that you studied in Cambodia?
- Yes I graduated from Cambodia, from the University of Food and Technology Engineer. I studied Agrohomme. I graduated in 1973 and then I enrolled to Cambodian Army and when American troops pulled out from Cambodia I was left down there and I was running for my life. So I escaped from, when the communist took over in 1975 I was pushed to stay in the country in Ta Keo for a couple weeks and they asked me to write my biography. And I told them I was a soldier working with Americans, and someone whispered to me, hey it won't be long they're going to kill me. And I just said hey I was trained as a military I'm not scared of them, so in the middle of the night, I escaped from South of Cambodian to North of Cambodia. I travelled a long time and I reached Battambang I was trying to look for my parents. I was caught too many times. Every time I had a chance I escaped again so I can reach a place called Chom Ka Kobah. And I was by myself down there nobody know me as a soldier and I worked hard like everybody else and I know that if I say something stupid they're going to kill me.

What year was this?
- 1975, after the takeover. And in 1979 when Vietnam invaded Cambodia I came back and I was looking for my parents. And finally I found my parents and I stayed with my parents for a couple months and I told them that I need to go across the border if I was looking for a good future. So that's why I travelled to the Thailand border and paid somebody to lead me in the middle of the night and they left us in the middle of a refugee camp. And we traveled through the mineland and everything.

So you were in the Thai refugee camp from 79, 80?
- No, in the communist regime, Cambodia fell in1975 and we stayed in Cambodia until 1979. And then I come looking for my parent. And then I found my parents in 1979 I come to Thailand. And then came back to Cambodia and then went back to the Thai border and worked with the United Nations for a couple months and put an application and come to America in 1981.

So you met your wife here?
- Yes.

So all of your kids were born in the United States?
- Yes

Interview 3 – Paula

1) How long have you lived in the U.S.?
- 38 years

So you came here in 1972?
- Yes

2) What has been your experience living in the U.S.?
- I do not have the journey of the refugee. I was sent to training in plant quarantine in Australia, and at the time, the war was still going on.

What year was this?
- 1972, in Australia, 3 months, at Columbo Plant in plant quarantine. What we planned was, at the time we thought we when the war end, then I would come back to start the quarantine in Cambodia. But at the same time I sent an application to LSU (Louisiana State University) for the graduate study, to get my Master's degree, at least. And it got accepted. And so at the time I talked to my boss, I was a soldier, to start the paper to release me from soldier, to go back to Agriculture, and at the same time I can go back to my studies.

So you were in the military in Cambodia?
- Yes, at that time, yes.

Which part of the military?
- Intelligence with the Cambodia Army, the Lon Nol Army. So I flew straight from Australia to Bangkok. I told mommy and dad that I'm not going back home. The paperwork is done and I'm going straight. I got my I-20 is done. So I just came straight to LSU.

And this was 1972?
- Yes. I didn't get the GRE (scores) at that level but Mississippi State was good enough, so my friend said, "well let's go to Mississippi State." So we both went. We went to Mississippi State. I got my Master's degree there.

From Mississippi State?
- Yes

So how long did you stay at LSU?
- I stayed there for one semester, because I needed a graduate assistantship to study, but my GRE (scores) were too low. But Mississippi said, ok, so I went there.

Did you know English before you came to the United States?
- Oh yeah, because the first time I came to the US was 1962 and then returned home 1966. So I already spoke English at that time.

So did you learn English primarily in Cambodia?
- I learned at LSU but I graduated from Thailand. I got high school (diploma) from Bangkok, Thailand.

How was your relationship with institutions, like the government, when they tried to help you to come to the United States? Did you have to work with the US government?
- The US government was okay. I had no problems. In the army, I worked with the US Embassy.

What about your relationship with schools, once you came to the United States?
- The school was good. I couldn't continue at LSU because my GRE was too low. You know you work for 6 years or 8 years and you completely forget your math.

3) What about your child's experience?
- She just like normal kid with a bump and burn here and there. But I was divorced when she was 6, so I was a single parent. We talked you know. I paid attention. I'm the kind of mother who would sit down, take her homework and look at her homework. And I'm probably the only one, it doesn't happen in this country, but it happens at home a lot, when we eat dinner I would ask her, "what's 7 times 9?" She can't answer that then no TV tonight. So I put pressure on her to study. Because we'd talk and I'd say, "you and I, that's it." My salary is so low so if you want to go to college, you get a scholarship. That's your aid. If you don't get (a scholarship) there's no way mom, with eighteen thousand dollars a year can pay for it.

So this is the kind of conversation you'd have…
- Yes this is the kind. We'd talk so she knows. She'd complain some times, but she knows. And she's a kind of B student all the way to A.

What about learning Cambodian and trying to embrace the Cambodian culture?
- Well, I didn't do very much because I had to work two jobs. I was lucky enough to have time to coach her with the education. I couldn't do both by myself with no father. All I could do was coach her with homework.

Coach her with homework?
- Yes

So for your daughter, you didn't encourage her to (embrace Khmer culture, but got cut off)?
- No, she was raised up like a good all American girl. But one thing I did was: when we divorced, I was in the Rio Grande Valley which is along the Mexico border. This is one of the few decisions I did right, when it came to my daughter. I chose not to live in Houston. When I divorced my mom said, "come and join us in Houston." And I said,

"no." Because I want my daughter to have a high degree and the only way you can stimulate, the environment is more important. And the only way I would leave is that the place I live would have a university. So I worked for Texas A&M so I'm going to continue living in College Station. Because of her. Education is good. That's what I want for her. I'm not going to live in Houston where the school is 30 miles away something like that. So we lived in that town, and that was the town I chose to live when she grew up. She was joking 10 years ago, she said, "you know mom Texas A&M is my playground." Her playground was the university. She said that, "I didn't even know that I didn't have to go to college. I just thought I'd go to school and then I'd come and finish high school and then I'd come and go to college.

So you wanted to surround her by the university?
- Yes, even now I believe that environment is more important. I'm a biologist, okay. So we believe in the gene. But we have already proved that environment plays 50 percent (next to) genes.

Environment compared to what?
- Compared to genetics. Environment plays an important part in your life.

4) In your view, what kinds of preparation do U.S. schools emphasize?
- When it comes to school, you know, most of my students now get out of high school, and they don't know anything about math. I yell and scream at them, "what do you mean you don't know what 10 square is? It's not equal to 20, it's equal to 100." Ten times ten two times. How in the whole world did you graduate from high school in the first place. Simply because they didn't have any parents who would sit down. With me, my daughter was all I had. I had no husband. So I put all of what I had minus three hours of sleep, because I have to sleep, on her. So every time the children come home, and you don't ask them, "you don't have homework today?" They don't think you care. I asked her every day, "what homework do you need help?" Of course, I was educated so I was in a position to help her with her homework, especially math and science. Not many Cambodian parents, especially mothers, could do that. But you don't have to have a degree. You don't have to have knowledge. You just have to ask, "do you have your homework? Is it difficult? What did you learn today?" And I did all of those right. I chose the environment and I gave her all of my time. I didn't run around looking for a second husband. I do all of that for her. And it works for me. It may not work for the other families. But it works perfectly the way I had it planned. You can prepare them since they were young. Once they become a teenager they don't want you to ask them anymore about homework.

Do you think US schools prepare students for college?
- Yes, especially in college station. The school, that is a place, that is the home of a university. Most of the people who live there in College Station, most of the people are in business or professors. And so the whole thing has to go together. You prepare, the school prepares you, the school has to prepare because the university is next door. So you get the teachers who come out of school.

What do you think about cities that aren't surrounded by universities? How do those schools, high school and middle schools, prepare you for college, do you think?
- It's hard to say because now that I'm teaching the product of high school, I'm disappointed. I'm not the only one. The whole city, the whole USA, we all know that our students when they come out of high school, they know nothing. Because schools, I asked and I was told this, I hope it's not true, that the high school has to let the students graduate because they had to meet a quota. Like you had to let 35 percent of students graduate, or else you're not going to get aid from students. So they just let students who don't know math, don't know science (graduate from high school), because they have to meet the quota. Our high school system is bad. We are not preparing students to go meet the challenge in the university at all. I was also told that teachers would give a test memorize it and that's it. I was shocked. But I said, "no I'm not going to do that to you. That was high school. You're in college now." I tried to change them, prepare them to go to higher class. But our high school system in the US is not very good. Not very good. Schools have not prepared students at all. We're talking about the schools next to Texas A&M, not the little schools in Houston. And that is still bad.

5) What does education mean to you?
- Everything. I could divorce my husband. Actually, I ran away because he said, "if you leave me I will kill you." So I have to tell you that I ran away. I could do this because I have education. If I don't have education he could beat me up twice every day and I would still be there. Now what I have noticed about most Cambodians is I have never missed a PTA meeting. I have never missed…but I'm different. I never missed anything, teacher conference, you know I go to everything, school opening, and I befriend all the teacher. Parents have to do that. Cambodian parent's don't know what PTA is. Honestly, don't know what PTA is. They never go to the meeting at the opening of school and when schools call the parents for a conference, they don't know what that is because they're too busy making money. Of course they make money and I don't, but that's fine. But I never miss PTA. If I have an appointment (somewhere else) I postpone it because my daughter's education, I want her to be able to fight the world the way I fought the world. Anything in life you can stand on your own two feet and that's what I prepare my daughter for because my married life is like that. So I want her to be like me. You can pack your bags and stand on your own two feet anytime. You don't have to be home and get beaten up every day. And I planned that and it works. So you have to get involved with the student.

Why is education important to you?
- Because I could not do what I did in my life if I was cute, pretty little girl who graduated from high school. And get married. Have two houses, three cars. I could not do it. My life is not a sweet road, it's bumpy.

Who encouraged you to believe in education?
- My mom. She used to tell me that she could do everything in the whole world. My mom did not go to school. Cambodian women (during her time) didn't go to school. She educated herself. She could read everything in Cambodian. She could read the books in Cambodian. Most of the Cambodian women could not because they have to be servants

to their husbands. My mom taught me how to read. And she pushed me to the high education. And she fought my father who did not want me to get the scholarship to the US. They got into a big fight because I came here (to the US).

So you had a strong female role model?
- Oh yeah, I had a strong female role model. I didn't know that at the time. But that was my environment. I had a mother who pushed me to study.

Who do you think was your mom's role model?
- Her life. She didn't have anything. She didn't know anything. She just wanted to be something different.

6) When it comes to educating your child, what does family-school partnership mean to you?
- It means a lot. Okay for example like when you work two jobs you don't have time to put your eyes on your daughter. Now children they watch their parents, if the parents don't pay attention, "mom don't care, dad don't care. You want me to spend a night at your house then we can sneak out to the bar? They don't care." But if your mom is talking to your teacher, every week, would you like to do something, no. Whatever she did in school I would know because the teacher would tell me. So the children think, "oh, she cares. My mom cares. So I better not do bad in school because she is going to hear about it." But if you never show up, you never care, you don't even know the teachers name…teachers cannot do alone. They have eight hours (at school). We don't have eight hours we only have two or three hours. But if children are at home and they see that you don't care, it shows children that you do care.

What do you think about the time when school is over? We call that "after-school time." Some people think that after-school time is also very important. How do you think that relationship with the school is like?
- Again, you're interviewing someone whose life is not like the normal people. Remember I told you that (daughter's name) was laughing when she went to Texas A&M, "this is my playground." I would pick her up, I worked in a lab, I was a lab technician, I would go pick her up from school and I would take her to the lab. In my office I have a little sleeping cart. We had a bicycle in the back. I'd drop her off at the Student Union I gave her two or three dollars so she can eat something. And with her bicycle she can bike all around Texas A&M campus. And go to the Student Union and eat something and drink something. When she gets tired she comes to my office and go take a nap there.

What's the Student Union?
- You know where the student go to spend time eating and relaxing.

So like the student center?
- Yes. But that's how she grew up on campus. She was a special type of student. Not everyone (has a chance) to go up on campus, you know your mom works at the school.

What about the idea of culture when it comes to teachers and Cambodian families working together? How do you think culture comes into play?
- The Cambodian culture would have more chance. Okay, we're talking about the Cambodian and Cambodian. That's a good one, because when the children come home, the mother is always there. But it doesn't happen like that in the United States because the mother is always working. So when the children come home they just stay home alone. When you stay home alone, you have friends, and friends have friends, and if one of them is bad, then it reaches you faster. So the Cambodian way, I like the Cambodian way, of course, where the mother doesn't work or they work part time. Most of my friends here they do the same thing. When the children go to school they get a job early in the morning. They get a part-time job so they can stay home with the children. It should have been done that way. I mean that's the perfect way but it never happens like that.

7) What can teachers and families do together to help children at school?
- Talk to each other. I knew that (daughter's name) is not good in something, because the teacher would write it down. And so I would talk to the teacher, "oh yeah, I know she's good in here." I know where to encourage her and where to let her go because if we praise her in the wrong place then maybe she's going to get mad and say, "shut up mom." So the attitude it helps because with children you know where the weakness is and what is the strength.

Can you give me an example of praising in the wrong place?
- I didn't study tonight or if the children already…You have to know your children. You can't sit down and watch tv and (just assume) that they have finished working. You have to see them finish working. You want them to study. You can't just say, "hey you didn't study you just watch tv" when the children know they already finished. So they think "my mom don't care no matter what I do she thinks I'm lazy. But I'm not. I finished my homework. She didn't ask me." That's why when you don't know the children, you act like a mother but children they expect you to know. "I finished it mom that's why I'm watching tv."

So you said teachers and parents can talk to each other more. What else do you think they can do?
- Give them a high hope. When the school had a spelling bee my daughter had the second number. Another friend of hers who came from Thailand, her father was also a teacher, won (the spelling bee) from that school, but she was the second number. I gave her hope that "it's not difficult, I can help you." And I help you every day. After dinner instead of watching tv we can study the book. She was different because she had a mother who was educated. Not every girl has that. But the mother has to give her high hope. You can't just say, "ah, you're not good enough, you're not good at spelling. Why should you put your name in the spelling bee?" I told her, "go ahead, honey, I'll help you." And she almost won. She was number two. For me it's good enough.

What about you and teachers? Thinking about when your daughter was in middle school or high school, what do you think you and those teachers could have done more to help your daughter?

- In that part, there was nothing else I could do more because I had to work. I'm a two-jobs mom and so when she grew up and she'd come to the apartment alone, I could not be there. I usually told her, "you cannot watch this movie or tv, you cannot watch this movie." But I found out later on that when my daughter would say, "mom I'm going to spend a night at (a friend's) house." I know her father is a teacher and her mom is a teacher at another school, I'd say, "that's fine, you can go spend a night." But what I didn't know was that the movie that they were watching at the house, because her mother would allow her, because they didn't care, not allow, but they didn't even check. Many years later I said, "that's the kind of movie I told you not to watch." And she'd say, "no mom I watched that at (her friend's) house. That's many years later. That's how I know. Not every mother can tell you not to watch this move, but I do, because if there's a lot of sex. You're twelve years old. But she watched it at somebody's house. But sometimes society…

In your opinion, if the child isn't doing well in school, what do you think parents/guardians should do?

- Get together. You have to find out which one, what her weakness is. (Daughter's) weakness is not in math, but in science. I told her, "why don't you want to become scientist?" She said, "mom, I look at your paycheck. 18k a year. No." But because I'm there, I tutor her and I coach her. So she's never made an F in anything. She's an A and B student. 3.75 or 3.5. She's a B student. I never had a problem with that. I never had to talk to her teacher. My daughter never made an F because I helped her. So I was just lucky. But she's intelligent. But (if) she would have made an F in math, I would have known, because her teacher would have told me. My daughter would have told me, "I made an F in Algebra." And I would have sit down before and after dinner. "Okay, sit down. I'm going to teach you about Algebra. But again I could do that because I had a Master's degree, high school Algebra should be easy for you to do that. But (if) I didn't have anything and I just graduated from high school, I couldn't help her.

8) What can teachers do to encourage stronger partnerships with families?

- How does my daughter behave in school? Was she a happy child, is she happy? If looks like she's in trouble every day, then I know there's something, besides the B or C or grades. Something that I would not know, because I don't see how she behaves at school she could be happy child at home but when she goes to school she always has trouble so I know that she has social problems. Teachers can do that. PTA meeting is the best.

Why do you think it's the best?

- Because that's the time when your children are not there.

So it's just adults talking?

- Adults talking. Because you can talk, you can ask, and usually you know. But even PTA doesn't work much because sometimes if the teacher is your friend, she will not tell you in the meeting. One-to-one is better. If you can get one-to-one, that's better.

So privacy?
- Yes

You think people are more honest when there's privacy?
- Yes but, you don't have to be friendly with the teacher, but you have to talk to them more than twice. It's better if you know each other by the first name. Then your child is going to be set, because you can ask her, "yesterday (my daughter) came in and she was crying, did you know that? Oh no. Why would my daughter cry at school?" If she (the teacher) didn't tell me I wouldn't know it. They have to be able to talk between both of them.

9) What can families do to encourage stronger partnerships with teachers?
- I'm a teacher of college students. But that would be so nice if we can have the PTA again so I can tell the parents, "your son is so low in math. Find him a tutor or something." I have to behave like a mother sometimes nowadays, because they don't know…

To your students?
- Yes. There are too many students. I have to tell them, "come on. You're going to get an F in this class. You have two more weeks." And it works. There's an example and I'm really proud of that. I sit down with this student, "you have only 10 days before the final exam. You have an F right now. You know what. You're not stupid. You just don't pay attention. "Oh I tried." "No you didn't really try. Now, you come and see me every day after class and I'm going to ask you what I've just taught. You answer me, and if you answer wrong that means you didn't understand." That's how I help. And he got a C because I curve. Actually he got a D. You curve 10 percent kick him up to become a C. And I met him at the mall one day, and he said, "oh Dr. (X), oh thank you very much. Thank you very much." I mean that was the first 10 days in his life that he studied that hard. So he didn't have to get kicked out of school.

What about the idea of helping each other better understand different cultures?
- That's hard because a lot of teachers…let me put it this way. I've lived in several different states. Texas is special, because people in Texas they don't care. There's a word I can think of it. I don't care about you. I close my eyes. I can live next to you but I don't pay attention to you. There's a terminology that I cannot think of right now. They don't talk to you. They don't treat you bad they don't treat you well.

They're indifferent?
- Indifferent. They know you're there. "Hi. Good morning how are you?" But that's it. They're polite but they don't pay attention to you. And I've felt that all my life living in Texas. I went to Mississippi it's different. The culture there is, "hi!" and they give you a hug. Texas is indifferent. That's the word. They're polite. They invite you to their group but all the time you know that you're different. It works for Texas so that's okay. Now, most of the teachers, if they have grown up in Texas and they've never seen anything further away from Houston, you're going to meet that kind of teacher. I have done this

and I know that I have done this or have been doing this or I will do this, I invite myself into their group. And I was having fun watching them squirm because I was there. I've got my PhD, you've got your PhD so I'm equal to you. But at the same time they didn't know what to do with me. That was Texas.

So, we don't know what this word is. I think it's indifferent. But let's not call it indifferent. Let's just say what you've just said, you know, "Texas neighbors or Texas teachers will say hi to you, and then that's it.

- Yes

How do you think that impacts their relationship with you and also with your daughter?

- They don't impact me but they impact my daughter. The teachers are nice but… When the teachers talk to the other American parents, it's different, and the children, they know.

How is it different?

- It's your actions. The students watch. They don't treat my mom like they treat the rest of their friends (parents). But they're so nice to my mom, so polite. There's nothing wrong, but there is something that you're not going to…The children they do that. But luckily, as I've said, there's something that I did right also, I just realized that when I become 60, I just invite myself in there. All my social life involves with the American parents. I invite myself into their group. Sit down and the group. So all of her friends, the daughters of the American church group or teachers group, so she never feels she's anything different, because I'm there. The children say, "oh my mom's a part of this church group and they're all American and I'm the only Asian." But what she didn't know because she wasn't sitting there, that I'm really not a part of them. But she sees society full of them. So my daughter thinks she's American. It's bad because she can't get along with the Cambodians, I'm sorry for that. I have to choose one of them. We live in here. That's what I tell them. We live in Texas. We live in USA. It's alright if my daughter can only do this. She has her degree but she doesn't know how to speak Cambodian because she's not going to go back there.

10) In what way has your involvement in the church helped in preparing your child for school?

- I grew up in a Catholic boarding school.

This was back in Asia?

- Yes in Asia. I grew up in Thailand in a boarding school. So again environment. I didn't know anything else but God. God looked at me all the time. When I do something wrong I can't hide because God be looking just like (what happened to) Adam and Eve. So I didn't have a chance to see the other side. I raised my daughter to go to church, but I think I lost her when she was about 18. When she got to college she said, "those church people are such hypocrites." She's old enough to see what I didn't tell her or what I didn't want her to see. And nowadays she shies away from church, because she's already seen the good parts, what she's supposed to do good, what the church teaches. Even now she thinks they're all hypocrites. When you see somebody do bad, you think you're not the bad person. But when you see them do bad and they talk good. That's what she said.

But she already knows the good. So it's nothing wrong when she calls my friend a hypocrite.

So you said the church taught her how to do good? Can you tell me a little bit more about that? What exactly are you talking about?
- You know, life in Catholic church, they teach you about abstinence and all kinds of things. But the way she talks, there's a priest and he got married, and she said, he's a hypocrite. That's why she stop going to church. She sees that society's at fault, not herself. Even now my daughter doesn't go to church, I've done the best I could. When I release her into society, she's an adult, society's at fault. People are hypocrites. You see a lot of bad people go to church every Saturday and Sunday and sooner or later they go and sleep with somebody's husband. She's seen all of those and I can't stop her from that. She's seen the real thing. But I hope one day she's going to think back, "hey life was good at the time." Maybe she'll do something later on. I don't know yet.

Is there anything else you want to tell me about family-school partnerships? Families and teachers?
- There is one thing about society. You raise them the way you want but (when they grow up) you lose them to society. A lot of Cambodian parents don't care about society. They let their children run loose. Besides if they don't pay attention in school in the first place, the children don't have the teachers help. In fact, some of the students don't even know that so-and-so teach Biology. So they didn't have the part, and I was sad because I wanted it to change. If I studied like you studied, I would like to go to every Cambodian and say, "hey, put your attention to her teacher, to her school, go to the meeting." They don't do that so I can't help. Besides I'm a scientist not this part. I have seen they don't know anything. It's okay if they can't understand what students are studying, but go show the student, show your son your daughter that hey, daddy cares. He can barely read English but he does care. He wants to see me with my friends. He wants to see my teacher. Cambodians are too busy to do that. They might say, "oh why should I go? I don't speak English?" You don't have to speak English just watch them see how other people interact and you can learn from how they behave. Most Cambodian people don't do that and I'm not in society (to the point where) I can help them.

So you think parents/guardians should be…
- more involved in the school. I even went to sell, at lunch time, I went to help sell ice cream. I volunteered for one hour during my lunch time. I take my sandwich and I served the students ice cream in the cafeteria. I did everything I could with the time I didn't have. And I want Cambodian parents to do that.

How do you think we can encourage Cambodian families to do that?
- They don't. And you can't, because they look at you (and say), "I don't have to do all of that, I'm rich. Look at me I have the biggest car, I have Rolls Royce car. I have three to five houses, I don't have to pay attention to all of those. It's their idea of what life is. You can't fight with money. You can't go and tell them hey you need to pay attention to your children. Oh I don't have to she can just marry the rich guy. It has to be done before they came here. We have no Cambodian who are already here except the refugees and leave

them to American society where their parents are involved with their children at school. There is no in between. And I could not do anything. I did not know anything. So I should have done more when I was…but I was trying to…being a single parent you really don't have a life. I should have been there, someone who's smart should have lead…do whatever you want. Work hard work hard get the house and that's all there is, material. That's all they care about is material. I've seen a lot of Vietnamese. Now this is a different culture, a lot of Vietnamese students of mine…high percentage they go to college and they're all "A" students. They study, you know what they study, Pre-Med. Business. Rarely do you have a Cambodian go. There's only three or four Cambodians who graduate from Texas A&M.

What do you think causes that difference between Cambodians and Vietnamese?
- I don't know. First I thought it was money. But the Vietnamese they're rich too. I don't know. It's something ingrained in their mind from home. Maybe we came from the horror. All the parents escaped the Killing Fields. The Vietnamese they also have Killing Fields too. So I think it's something beyond that. I don't know. Or maybe it's because all of our educated people are dead. For the Vietnamese, all of the educated people are alive because they were the ones who ran away from the country. The poor people, the ignorant people, they're all dead. All the boat people they're educated. So it's opposite from Cambodia. In Cambodia all the educated people are all dead. The boat people or the refugees are farmers. That's the difference. There's nothing we can do about it, which is unfortunate. I've come to that and I've made peace with myself, because I blame myself for not helping them, I helped my mom. When I meet her I taught her English. My mom can write her name and can read some English words, because I worked with her. But I could not help the other families. Now I am at peace with myself. I couldn't do it because they came from nothing.

Interview 4 – Larry

1) How long have you lived in the U.S.?
- about 35 years

2) What has been your experience living in the U.S.?
- My experience is working and that's it.

Working, okay.

What was it like to learn English in this country?
- I went to school for a couple of years only so I can learn some of it. The rest I picked up on the streets.

What was it like to find work here, was it hard was it easy?
- For me, it was easy.

So you have two kids
- Yes

And how old are they?
- 7 (son) and 14 (daughter, full Cambodian from his wife's previous marriage)

3) What about your child's experience?
- They grew up here so everything is easier for them unlike us.

Do you encourage your kids to learn Spanish or Cambodian?
- Yes. Now they speak Cambodian because Momma she speaks to them in Cambodian all the time. I speak to them in Spanish and they're taking Spanish in school.

So they take Spanish at school and you guys speak to them in Cambodian at home?
- Right

Do you think they're more in to the American culture at home or the Cambodian culture or the Spanish culture?
- In the house, they are more into the Cambodian culture.

What kinds of things do they do (at home) to make you think that?
- The food for one thing. Yeah, so the food and how they live.

So you have two kids in school?
- Yes

4) In your view, what kinds of preparation do U.S. schools emphasize?
- In school prepares them kind of slower on some of the stuff. You know, in class, they're kind of slow compared to Mexico or Cambodia. Sixth grade in Mexico is kind of like a ninth grader here.

Oh sixth grader there is like a ninth grader here?
- Yes. Like for (son's name), the teacher always says I've got to do this or I've got to do that, but I never see no paper so I don't know if she (the teacher) is going to do that or not.

So you think it's easier for them here in the United States?
- Yes

How do you think that (school) prepares them for life?
- For life, no good.

Why is it no good?
- Okay, real life is harder. You've got to be tougher than that, not so easy like that.

Now I'm going to get into more specific questions about my own research about family-school partnerships and how family educates children. Sometimes they say that family members help kids in school. Sometimes they say that families educate kids they teach about hard work they teach them about a lot of different things. So families educate children in a lot of different ways.

5) What does education mean to you?
- education means, at home, if you teach them how to work hard, how to say hi, how to say good morning to people, how to respect elders, that's one of the main things for kids you know. Teach them how to respect people. You need to teach them how to work hard because it's (either) work hard or go to school.

Why do you think that's important for your kids?
- It's important because, for me, I was born my granpa teach me hard work. My dad teach me Christianity and to respect people. So I have both of them in me.

What about grades? What are your thoughts about grades?
- My thought about school grades, they're kind of easy for kids. They should be harder than that. Some kids have D's or C's that's too low. Make them work harder and make them pass with a better grade than a C or D.

6) When it comes to educating your child, what does family-school partnership mean to you?
- That means to me like if I go to school and ask how my kids are doing, I want a straight answer. I want them (the teacher) to tell me how I can help my kid to improve or what he needs to be done for him to improve something. That's what it means to me.

Can you give me an example of when you had to interact with a teacher at school about your kids?
- Yes, like (son's name), he likes to play a lot and have fun at school. You know so I have to go to school a lot to talk to the teacher or the teacher will send me a letter saying he's doing this bad. So I have to go and talk to the teacher. But I want specifics.

Do you think they've been specific about some things?
- Yes, they've been specific about (son's name), yes.

We also talk about the importance of understanding different cultures. You know how American teachers sometimes have a different culture from the parents at home. Can you tell me a little bit about that? What are your thoughts about different cultures at home and at school?
- This is kind of hard for me. Like I've said, I went to school here for two years. Back then, the teacher, when you do something wrong, they spank you, which my dad was okay with that. I wish it would be the same way right now. Right now, the kids are being bad, all the way from home to school. They don't respect teachers. Me, I'm okay if the teachers have to hit my kid. That's okay with me if they do something wrong. I don't like the kids to be so open, so free.

So you think the teachers at school are too free with the kids?
- Yes

They let kids get away with a lot?
- Yes

7) What can teachers and families do together to help children at school?
- Like I told you, respect people, that's one thing. Especially at school, make sure they (students) respect teachers. Dress code, for school, that's very important, because that's what I mean by free, pants down, open. When I went to school, I had to have a tie, nice and neat. You're hair short. Not the same at home. So I would like to see that at school.

So you think parents should talk to teachers about that, teachers should talk to parents. How do you think we can make this happen?
- Make that, what they call that?

Parent-teacher conference?
- Right. Talk about it and bring those points.

Have you been to any of your kids parent-teacher conference?
- Once

Did you feel like you could talk to your teachers openly and honestly?
- No. Only when you talk one on one. That's okay. But when you got a lot of people it's hard.

Why is that hard for you?
- It's hard for me to talk to somebody in front of a lot of people. But when it's one on one it's easier.

8) What can teachers do to encourage stronger partnerships with families?
- Teachers can do more about the kids. Put more attention to them. You know it's not just a job. To be a teacher you have to love the kids. You have to focus on whoever has the problem. Put more attention to my kid. One at a time is better than the whole class.

So focus on your kids one at a time?
- Yes, one at a time.

Is there anything else you think teachers could do?
- I think that's one of the main things. I know for a fact that if teachers show love to the kids, the kids will listen to people. But if the teachers never talk to them and just check their homework or anything. And just check, check, bad, bad, and then never talk to the kids, what's going on, what happened to you.

9) What can families do to encourage stronger partnerships with teachers?
- Like I said, if they tell me what needs to be done, I'll do it. Make sure he do homework. Make sure he read. Make sure he do that instead of watching tv, instead of playing. So that's how we improve. My kids, I ask do you have homework. They say yes, I make sure they do the homework.

10) In what way has your involvement in the church helped in preparing your child for school?
- From church, like I said, in church we believe in God. And we tell them (his kids) what's good, what's bad. We teach them how to respect people. Just be the right way, you know. Dress up right, and try to be different from others.

How can it be different?
- It's different because once you have, let's say, respect for God, don't do this, don't do that bad thing, so they can keep you in line.

Is there anything else you want to tell me about education, the Cambodians, you as a parent, teachers?
- Cambodians and Hispanics, culture is almost the same.

How is that the same?
- Relationship with the kids and the families, almost the same. You don't let your kids go out, play with other kids all the time. Stay away from the house. Families be together all the time. Culture between Mexicans and Cambodians about the same.

Can you compare that to the American culture?
- No, not at all.

How's it different?
- It's different, because in the American culture, they let the kids go out by themselves. Oh he's 14, she's 15, they can go out with their friends. Go here go there.

Is that something you've seen with other American people?
- Yes, with my kids friends.

So you said you were educated in Mexico?
- Ninth grade in Mexico and then two years here, 11th grade in the US

So what's your occupation?
- I'm a screen cleaner at a printing company and I've done that for many years now.

Interview 5 – Sarah

1) How long have you lived in the U.S.?
- 13 years

So what year did you come here?
- 1997

2) What has been your experience living in the U.S.?
- Just learning English and watch the kids

How did you learn English?
- Talking to people

3) What about your child's experience?
- be a good kid, be a good mother

Do you speak to them in Cambodia at home?
- Yes

Do you think it's important to speak to them in Cambodian or English?
- For me, speaking Cambodian is very important but they don't want to learn.

Why is it important for you?
- Because we are Cambodian. Our language is very important. But the kids here they don't really like to talk to us in Cambodian.

Why do you think they don't like to talk to us in Cambodian?
- I don't know.

4) In your view, what kinds of preparation do U.S. schools emphasize?
- It's good for the kids.

How is it good?
- Because they have more opportunity to do whatever they want in this country.

5) What does education mean to you?
- It's a good thing because you can do whatever you want to do with education. You have more opportunity.

6) When it comes to educating your child, what does family-school partnership mean to you?
- It's good if you have time with the teacher, to talk to them, get to know the teacher so the teacher can help, you know, tell you about how your kid in this class. It's good if you have time to go there.

But if you don't have time, then what do you think?
- It's not a really good thing to contact the teacher.

7) What can teachers and families do together to help children at school?
- That's good to be together, at least once a week.

But when you guys meet once a week, what do you think you should talk about?
- Just talk about how the kid doing at home and how the kid doing at school. If they're getting along with others in the class or not. Just try to get to know about your kids.

Can you tell me why that's important? Why do you think talking together is important?
- Because the kid, easy to get to know them when they talk. Right. They talk and you know them the way they talk.

So you know what the kids are thinking when they talk to you about it?
- Yes

8) What can teachers do to encourage stronger partnerships with families?
- It's good to let us know about the kid at school. Let us know whatever they do wrong so we can correct the kid. That means it's good.

Have you ever had to talk to teachers about your kids before?
- Sometimes

Can you tell me about that, one or two stories?
- Yeah, every Tuesday, on my day off, I go and eat lunch with him (my son). I always ask the teacher how my kid doing. If they get along with other kids, if he's a good boy. I try to ask them. And if my kids do something wrong then she lets me know. So that means it's good for us you know, so we can tell him the right way.

Is that something the teacher tells you to do, every Tuesday?
- No. They just say if you have time you go. But they don't ask you all the time.

So you just spend one hour and eat lunch with him?
- Yes, every Tuesday on my day off.

Did you do that with your daughter?
- Yes, not right now, but when she was little.

Why do you think that's important to spend time with your kids at school?
- Because it makes the kids happy. It makes them feel like the mother still needs them and care about them, even if they're at school, mommy still eat with them to show love. Stuff like that.

And that's why you decided to eat at school. Nobody told you to do this?
- No

9) What can families do to encourage stronger partnerships with teachers?
- It's better to stay at home and be with them (instead of working). Better if you spend a lot of time with them so you have time to watch them, to correct them.

If you could stay home with them, what would you do with them?
- Just try to keep an eye on them. You see something wrong you there right away. If you always work, the kid do something wrong, you don't know.

Is there anything you could do better to help the teacher?
- For me I just tell you the truth, like, if I speak English very well, I'd like to help the teacher, no matter what.

To assist them in classroom?
- Yes cleaning and stuff like that, I like to help.

But you're English is good enough to talk (with them). What else do you think you could do to help the teacher?
- Like I said, if I offer to help, I can do it. I cannot help them with the reading or writing but I can help them with the cleaning or take care the little kid, stuff like that.

10) In what way has your involvement in the church helped in preparing your child for school?
- Going to church is very important for our lives because church always teach you good things. You cannot just teach the kid and keep the kid at home. Better to take them to the church and let them be involved with somebody else and learn some more stuff beside home.

What kind of stuff could they learn?
- They can learn from the people like for preaching, for reading, tell them the right way.

The right way?
- How to be a good person. How to deal with people, you know stuff like that.

Is there anything else you want to tell me about education, teachers, if you could do anything to improve your relationship with teachers, do you want to tell me anything else?
- That's all, you know, like I told you, like me I can help, I already told you, for help, I don't mind. But for reading and writing, no. Beside that if they need me, I do it for them.

So if you had an opportunity right now, do you think you could help them?
- Like I said, if the school close to my house or around my neighborhood, if I can do it, I do it.

Interview 6 – Amy

1) How long have you lived in the U.S.?
- Since August of 1980, so I say 30 years.

2) What has been your experience living in the U.S.?
- It's easy, everything is accessible. I have fun living here growing up here compared to Cambodia. I left Cambodia when I was 10 years old going through Pol Pot. This is home I wouldn't go back to live in Cambodia. For visit yes I went back to visit Cambodia back in 1999 with my husband's family to see my relatives and his relatives. While I was there I had a bad experience. I wasn't used to the pot holes just the environment seeing poor people the houses and all of that. And when I came back to the United States I was so glad to step off the airplane and driving on the street with no pot holes. And it just feels (like) home here. I grew up here. Because prior to that, when I was 10 years old I don't remember much, you know?

Did you go to school here in the United States?
- Yes

When did you start school here?
- fourth grade

Up until high school?
- Yes up until high school and then a few years of college. I didn't finish college.

What did you study in college?
- The first two years I took the basics, the requirements for like English, Math and Biology and all that. But my goal was to go into nursing but I never reached that goal because I got married when I started college and then when I was in college two to three years and the third year I had my first child. So everything was kind of like, wait, wait, wait. And I've all been waiting. I think my credit is expired. They don't accept it no more. So I just stay home and take care of my children.

It's a tough job, I always tell my mom.
- I would say it's a tough job but I have easy kids to take care of. My kids weren't that difficult to take care of. They're really good kids. Easy to take care of. Yeah.

Did you know any English when you came to this country or did you learn here?
- None whatsoever. I started in fourth grade. I remember being in fourth grade made fun of. I still remember it but that's only natural because they're kids. It's natural but not acceptable. I guess that goes everywhere. You learn English, nose, eyes, ears (inaudible).

How did that make you feel? How did that experience make you feel? Being teased
- I felt bad.

Did you ever talk to the teacher about it?
- No, I was shy.

Did you talk to your parents about that?
- No, just deal with it. I guess the upbringing of being Cambodian during that time when I was little. I guess something like that you look at it as not as important. So you don't go to mom and dad for it.

Why did you think it wasn't important back then?
- I felt like I could deal with it on my own and I'm going to pass it. How I felt it's not going to be long term.

You think you've gotten over it now?
- Oh yeah! I've gotten over it and I've taught my kids not to tease people at school. Because one day they came home they saw a kid pee in their pants in kindergarten and I ask her, "what did you do, did you laugh, did you point finger and snickers with your friends? If you do you're wrong. You go and apologize." She said she didn't do that. I told them not to be a bully, teach them right, because I know how I felt.

Were you able to find a job, work part-time? What was that experience like?
- When I was in high school I worked odd jobs, Target, Walmart, just summer jobs, between…in the summer. And then I worked at Burger King when I was in college. And then when I got married I moved to Louisiana. I was in Dallas, I lived there for 12 years, from 1980 to 1991, I say 11 years. And then I moved to Louisiana the year I got married, 1991 to South Louisiana, because of my husband's job. He works in the oil industry. And I went to college over there and I lived there for four years.

In Southern Louisiana?
- yes

Which part of Louisiana?
- Houma. I lived there for four years. He's been there for five. After he graduated from UT. And we had our first child there. And that's why I didn't finish college, I just stay at home. And then I stayed at home to take care of my child. And then we moved here (Houston) in 1998.

Did you settle into Houston when you came from Cambodia?
- Uh uh (no), Dallas.

So you lived in Dallas from 1980 to 1991 and then you went to Louisiana?
- And then I came here and continued to be a stay-at-home mom until my kids started going to school. And that's when I started going to barber school. So I'm a barber now.

So you cut hair?
- Yes, I like my job. I have some regrets not finishing school. So when I heard you were a (doctoral student) in, what's your field?

"Education"

I said, "oh that's good." I was actually proud of you. And…some people might get jealous. I'm not jealous when I hear your stuff like that. I'm happy for people who succeeded. I just wish that I could have done the same.

Yeah, I know you worked hard for your degree. I wish that I… because my husband, he's a professional too. He's an electrical engineer. He works for Baker Hughes. He's a senior engineer over there. He's been there for 20 years.

Is your husband Cambodian?
- Yes, he's Cambodian. And I just wish I could have done more for myself. But just having stay at home and taking care of my kids. And teaching them the values and all that I think I succeeded. Plus they growing up now. You tell them a lot of things but they don't always follow you. And I like my job because since my husband work with a large company he has a lot of time off in the summer. Not the summer, the whole year vacation. So with my job it's easy to take off. We travel a lot.

Did you meet your husband in Dallas?
- I met him in church. It's actually somewhat kind of pre-arranged. He came to spy on me with his parents. I didn't know anything about it. And then after that the adults just got together and ask if we were interested, and we were interested in each other.

So it was pre-arranged? How did you feel about that? How do you feel about pre-arranged marriages in general?
- (laughing) during that time, I was okay with it because I just did what my mom and dad told me to do. And I'm happy with it, because some people, some of my friends will say, "oh, your marriage was kind of pre-arranged." The reason why I said it was kind of pre-arranged is because they didn't force us to get married. They kind of introduced us, and then we decided to get married. If I said, "no" my mom and dad wouldn't force me. And I'm happy with him. This August it's going to be 19 years. I think my mom and dad made the right choice. And I think I made the right choice by listening to them, because he's a very good man, a good father, a good provider, a good husband. Yeah.

And listening to your parents is something you've done your whole life I'm guessing?
- Yeah, it's how I was raised. But I don't always do what they say. Being a kid…But for our kids, I don't think I'm going to do what my parents did to me, you know, arranged, because they were born here. They grew up here, so they're American. I consider myself to be half and half, they was I think, you know, cultural. I tell them they can go pick their mate but they have to be selective. Be very selective and make good decisions. Make the…just want the best for them.

When you came to this country or while you were here, if had any experience with government institutions like refugees when you came here, did you have any problems, did you not have any problems?
-When we came here in 1980 we had a lot of help through the church. That's how we became Christians. There weren't any problems because the help just flows in. A lot of people helped us during the 80s early 80s. As I remember my mom and dad didn't have any trouble with the government like paper work and all that.

So dealing and interacting with government was pretty much okay?
- Yes

And your experiences with school, what was that like in general?
- You mean being in grade school?

Yourself in elementary, middle, high school?
- Well, when you come to a country where you don't speak a word of English, it was difficult at first. But as fourth grade passed, fifth and sixth, it got easier and easier because you understand the language and the culture.

So it was really the language barrier and the culture
- Yes

Can you give me a couple examples about the culture in America, something you had to deal with?
- When I first came, when I went to school, the kids they were like disrespectful to the teachers and I wasn't used to that. Because being Cambodian, you're brought up to respect the elders you know. That was one of them. And then when I went to junior high kids having boyfriends, you know Americans kids having boyfriends. I couldn't get passed that either. I think it's wrong, and then they got pregnant. That was a big taboo for me. Another thing, when I got to high school, I discovered gays and lesbians. I was so curious about that kind of lifestyle but now it's so normal to me, what I hear it's normal, it's the norm.

What about dating now, in middle school? What are your thoughts about that?
- When I was in middle school starting freshman (year), some of my friends had boyfriends and all that, I thought that was a big shocker to me. I mean, Cambodian people would just gossip. You know, they had American boyfriends and they go out on dates, and all that. That was just taboo back then. But now, who cares. Yeah that's one of the things I remember. And then my mom would say, don't hang out with her, she's going to influence you and all that, stuff like that.

But your thoughts about it today has changed, you said?
- Yeah, now that I have a teenage daughter because I keep telling my daughter that she's having the life that I did not have. I let her go out with friends, with her girlfriends, go to the mall, to the movies, and all of that. I didn't see my first movie until I was a senior in high school. And my daughter she's in eighth grade, and I let her go out with friends. But

you know, knowing what I went through, I tell her to be cautious (about) how people treat her. When you go out with friends to remember that you treat people with respect and just don't do anything stupid and don't let them influence you. I told her that I'm letting you do the stuff that I never got to do when I was young. When you go out with your friends to pajama night with friends, you know, if they talk about stuff that she's uncomfortable with like sex and all that, then she doesn't have to be engaged or if they introduce her to having drugs I mean taking drugs and all that, you have to be careful about that. There are certain drugs that you get addicted the first time you try it, like ecstasy and all that. I talk to her a lot of stuff about…growing up here what I know, the birds and the bees, my mom and dad didn't talk to me about that, you know. So sometimes I'm very blunt to my daughter, to let her know, you know. I'm just being a mom. Well, she's going to be in ninth grade, there's more things to talk to her.

3) What about your child's experience?

- Like I said earlier, I did not have the life that they had, because the reason they have what they have now because of my upbringing, not my upbringing, because of my husband's job and I'm helping him too. Because the big, the lifestyle that we have, because we go on vacation a lot, sometimes, two times a year, we go on cruises and just a lot of places, just flying. I think their childhood is so much better than mine, because they get to go on vacations. I did not. I did not go on vacation until I met my husband. You know we went on our honeymoon. Their childhood compared to my childhood, because we came to the United States in 1980. We came out of a country that was damaged, poor. We left the country with nothing in our pockets. So when we came to the new land, to the United States, all my parents did was work, work, work, and provide for the family. They have four children. And during that time, my dad was a teacher, when he came here, my dad was a teacher in Cambodia. My mom just stayed home and take care of us. So when he came here, he worked at Taco Bell, and during that time, the minimum wage is $3.25, I think, in 1980. It's not much. And my mom got paid around there too. So, we were very thrifty. My mom and dad were very thrifty, and they managed to save up and bought a house by 1986 and bought a car two years after we came, a Pontiac station wagon. They provided for us, put food on the table, shelter and clothing. But we did not have the necessity like going out to eat at McDonalds or vacationing and all that. So that's the difference, because my kids they have all of that because of what, because of the job my husband has.

Do you guys speak Khmer at home? Do you teach them about the Khmer culture?

- No, that's shameful. We speak English at home.

Why did you guys decide only to speak English?

- I don't know. I mean, when I was growing up in my household in Dallas, my mom and dad speak Khmer. We (the kids) speak Khmer. And then when I got married, and moved out of the house, and go live on our own, we just started speaking English.

Was your husband born in Cambodia or here?

- Cambodia. He came here when he was fifteen.

So he's five years older than you?
- He's about eight years older than me. When we moved out, we lived on our own, we started speaking English. And then, when we have our kids, it just come natural for me to speak to them in English. It's just natural. Now that I think about it I wish I had not done that. But if you gossip about them in Cambodian, oh yeah, they understand, but they can't speak. Their tongue won't role with the Cambodian syllable.

What about the Cambodian culture, do you guys try to emphasize that with your kids?
- No, not really. We just talk about it but I don't emphasize on it. I guess we're not involved with Wat temple, Wat Khmer and all that, so I don't really tell them about it. No. I would like them to know about it?

You would, why?
- Because I think it's important because they keep telling me that sometime we have an argument. I tell them that, "you are Cambodian-American." And they keep saying, "No, I'm an American." I say, "No, no, no. You're a Cambodian-American." And I say that, "you come from me, you are Cambodian and that it's important to know where you come from." I told them that. But they show no interest in it. I think partly it's my fault too.

Why do you think it's important for them to understand their Cambodian culture?
- Because where they come from, because I come from Cambodia. I want them to be American too, but hold on to the Cambodian tradition and culture too. I think it's important because some Khmer tradition and culture, I think it's good and some American (culture) are not. So it's half and half.

Can you give me an example of the Cambodian culture that is good and the culture that is bad?
- I like it that I'm older, I'm almost 40. I'm 40 not almost. The one thing that I see, Cambodian kids in Cambodia, they're very respectable to their elders. "Kay karop chas chas." And they're very helpful. I find that kids growing up here they tend to not work hard enough for what they have and they don't initiate the help that much. I find that's the difference too. I think that's part of the culture, wouldn't you agree?

You mean part of the American culture?
- I mean the kids being respectable. I find that the Cambodian kids are like that. They are respectable to the older people. And very polite.

How do you think that affects them in school? How do you think respecting elders how do you think that affects them in school?
- Going to school in the United States I see they diss (disrespecting) their teachers. That's not right. They're there to help you learn. And most of the time they are there babysitting the kids and that's not right either. They're just rude. They're rude.

How do you think that affects them at school?
- They don't learn and could look bad when people see that the way they behave. Say, "ooh, what kind of parents you have they didn't raise you right." And all that. I always

tell that to my kids, when you go places, you have to portray a certain behavior so people say, think that you are a respectable person. "Com aoy kay ta maneou chloy." Something like that, you know what I mean.

You don't want to come across as being disrespectful?
- But then you don't want people walk over you either.

So teach yourself some respect?
- mm hmm (yes)

Your kids have been okay making friends in this country, not okay?
- I think they're okay

4) In your view, what kinds of preparation do U.S. schools emphasize?
- That's a tough one. Emphasize of school?

Schools in America, what do they teach you to do? Do they teach you to work hard, do they teach you to get ready for college, do they teach you to go to work after high school, do they teach you to be respectful to your friends and teachers? What do they emphasize?
- I think everything what you just said. When you started kindergarten, they teach you how to be nice to people and not make fun of other people. And they teach you right from wrong. And they pass you from one grade to another. They just teach you more and more how to…by the time you get to twelfth grade, you pretty much know what to do.

5) What does education mean to you?
- I think education starts from the home. Ever since they little, they teach you how, we teach the children right from wrong, how to do stuff correctly. And then when they go to school, they…education I think is important because of the future. Without education, you don't know much. So going to school and getting a degree is the future to open doors to have a good job and all that to take care of the family.

What do you mean by taking care of the family?
- You go to school for 12 years in this country and after 12 years you go to school for another four or five years (college). In college depending on what you want to major in. And in college, being in grade school and high school they prepare you for college. So when you get to college, you aim for what you want to go for. Nursing, engineer, they have different classes for all that. Once you reach your goal they train you in college and you meet all of the requirements. You graduate and you go and find yourself a job. And hopefully you find a good job that pays you well, and you can start your life, buying a house and all that. But that's not as important because in all that I stress to my kids, you have to put God first, because God is important.

Why is God important?
- Because I grow up in a Buddhist family. You know, when I was in my country for those 10 years (in Cambodia), you just go to temple with mom and dad. You go because they tell you to go. And soon enough, you going to start to believe what they believe. Because

when you at that age you don't know yet. Okay. But, I guarantee you, if I stay in Cambodia I would be a Buddhist. I would believe in Buddha. And then when we came here in 1980, the Christian people help us with all that with a lot of things that we need for life. They would start bringing us to church. And that's how my dad convert to Jesus because he see the love that these strangers that we did not know, and they give us money to start our new life here. They give us clothing, food. Take us to the doctor, pay for our doctor's bill. When we see the love that they have, we want to know who is this God. And they don't force us. They only tell us, and we make that decision. And then, when I was little. We just come to church, because mom and dad come to church. Right. And the reason I believe in Jesus Christ is because I hear his words every Sunday throughout my years living in the United States, you know, I come out of my desire. I want to believe in him. And when I get to know him, read the bible and know Jesus, he is the Creator. He create me, he create this table, and he give us a will to decide. He's important because he is the God, he say that we should love him most, more than anything else. And you know it's hard. The bible say that being a Christian is not easy. Being a Christian is very hard. Trust me, lot of temptations, you know. I'm a Christian for a long time, but some time, I don't do what the bible say. You know, I should read my bible every day and pray every day, I don't. But as a whole, I believe in him. But every day you live your life, you strive to be Christ-like. And I trust to my kids that, you always put God first, believe in him and do what he say, everything else just falls according to his will for you.

6) When it comes to educating your child, what does family-school partnership mean to you?

- Get involved with your school. Go to PTA meetings. Talk to the counselors. Talk to the teachers see how your child progress in school if there's any problem. And just get to know the teacher, what they teaching at school, so when they come home, you have an idea of what they're learning at school. And help them out with homework and all that.

Are your kids involved in any programs or activities after school?

- They use to but not anymore.

Do you think afterschool programs are important?

- I think it's important but it's also hard for me because my husband and I, we work late, so if they involve in program after school, no-one go pick them up. But one time they join tae kwon do.

Why do you think afterschool programs are important?

- I think it's important because it gives them an extra curriculum to do after school. Set their mind to do something other than school work. Give them an idea of what else to do besides just reading all the time.

What about volunteering? Do your kids volunteer?

- I think it's good to volunteer because when you volunteer you get to know people. Different work environment is also teach them how to be a hard worker.

7) What can teachers and families do together to help children at school?

- I think that teachers are doing their best teaching at school. That's what they trained for when they were in college. So they go to work at school and they get paid for it to do their job. I find that sometimes the teachers, when they have problems with a student, they try to call home and try to get the parents involved. Sometimes the parents just blame it back to the teachers. And that's not right because they're there to teach your children. If something goes wrong and the teacher reports it to the parents, they should work together. I think the parent should work even more than the teacher and try to teach the kid at home certain things and what is to be expected at school, because I know that the teacher when they go to school and teach, they put in 100 percent in each day.

8) What can teachers do to encourage stronger partnerships with families?

- Encourage the kids to learn, just tell the kids to learn. And even though they don't feel like doing it, like writing, just keep writing and learning new vocabularies to improve their writing skills, just doing a lot of math homework, just improve their arithmetic skills and all that even if they don't fell like doing it. But it's going to pay off in the long run. The parents should teach the kids to discipline themselves to do all that even though they don't feel like it, because it's for their future so they get used to, how you say, good work ethic. Because going to school isn't going to last forever, after you graduate, you work and you going to have free time. But to succeed in the future, you just have to work hard while you're in school.

9) What can families do to encourage stronger partnerships with teachers?

- Well, in my opinion, I think teachers as long as I can remember and heard about it, they get paid very, very little. I think some teachers get paid a little more than others, for the ones just starting out, I heard some pay like 20 thousand a year. I think that's too little. Why I say it's too little, they go to school, they have to deal with all these kids. Sometimes they are misbehaving, sometimes they have mental problems plus they do a lot of writing a lot of planning. They take their work home, homework home and grade it at home. They stay after school for PTA meetings (and) other things I used to see in school. I think they should (get) paid more because I think they over work and plus they have a lot of work. And many, many times they take their work home and grading homework and all of that. I say they should start out a salary say 50 thousand a year.

- They get to know the teachers more and ask questions to see what the teachers need. You know, some teachers they gave their all to teach the kids and the school don't even provide them enough money to buy supplies and some of the supplies that they buy come from their own pocket. And you can get to know the teacher by asking the teacher what they need and how they can help de-stressing them out so they don't feel overwhelmed. And chaperone when they go on fieldtrips they need chaperones really, really bad because the kids, they tend to be rowdy. Just help them out with parties and all of that, parties, holidays, providing them drinks and snacks.

So it sounds to me that parents and families should try to get involved a lot more than teachers trying to reach out to the families? Or do you think it's both?

- I think it’s both way. If they want their kids to have a bright future then get to know the teachers and be involved and then come home and teach…try to encourage your kids to learn what the teachers are trying to teach.

What about those teachers who don’t care about kids? What do you think those teachers can do more to get involved?
- They’re in the wrong profession if they feel like that. Maybe I’m stereotyping when I say this when teachers don’t care, maybe they’re young teachers. They just come out of school like they’re 22 or 23. When they’re at that age they like to go out and have fun. Maybe they just show up and do their work and not really care about it. So just have a paycheck in their pocket.

10) In what way has your involvement in the church helped in preparing your child for school?
- I think being involved in this place you learn from another, good values, what the bible teach, just come to teach and you listen to the pastor preach and what the bible say. You instill those values in your children and hope that they grow up the right way, the way they should be, because you always hope for the best, and hope that they walk in the path of God and put God’s words in their hearts. I think that’s important.

Interview 7 – Charles

Background information
Interview received, December 10, 2010
Follow-up questions, December 26, 2010
Responses to follow-up questions received, January 8, 2011

1) How long have you lived in the U.S.?
- I have lived in the US for 23 years.

2) What has been your experience living in the U.S.?
- During the first one year living in the US, it was so shock for me because of the new culture and environment plus foods have made me homesick. We worked out everyday to adopt and change to the new culture and environment around us. A couple years later, life seemed to be settle down. We started to see things positively and enjoy the prosperities and have a peaceful mind that this country has offered. We work hard everyday to support our family and learned how to save some money for our future. As time progress, I have taken time to attended college and graduated with AA degree. To my experience, living in the US is quite a challenge.

3) What about your child's experience living in the U.S.?
- It was the same as the adult, at home they seemed to happy. But at school they were lost for the first second year of school. English was the second language had made them working so hard to keep up with all school curriculum; to master all the level of subjects in class were really something they must be success. Years later, they seemed to be working very well in all area of subjects.

4) In your view, what kinds of preparation do U.S. schools emphasize?
- In my view, US school prepares students to be a student to be a productive citizen. To help build not just education itself but also build character to become someone that they can be as individual as a whole society.

5) What does education mean to you?
- Education, to me means "Enlighten" which is the key to success in life. Successful in life mean to better understand not just something around ourselves, but oversee the whole world in which we are living in. In order to help build a better life for everyone else who share their lives with us on this planet.

6) When it comes to educating your child, what does family-school partnership mean to you?

- The family-school partnership is the beginning, vital factor in child education. I believe child's education start first at home then second at school.

(Clarification questions) You said the "child's education start first at home then second at school." What exactly do you mean? What should families do at home. What should teachers do at school that's different from home? How can home and school work together?

- To me, in general, education is a broad term of learning. Kids start learning at home how to walk, talk and behave while academics and skills are learned at school. Home and school work together by open the communication between teachers, parents and students.

7) What can teachers and families do together to help children at school?

- Back in Cambodia 40 years ago (may be not at the present?); parents believed that education was a sole responsible for teachers. The children pass or failed the test, have good grade or bad all felt on teachers. Since all children are the future to dominate the planet earth, in my opinion, parents and teachers should make a commitment to scarify their times and talents, to work hand in hand together to ensure the quality and success of our children education.

(Clarification question) How can "parents and teachers work hand in hand together to ensure the quality and success of our children?"

- Of course, each one of us has our own roles to play in children life. Therefore we must open our ways of communication. Keep each other inform regarding the progress of our kids either at home or at school.

8) What can teachers do to encourage stronger partnerships with families?

- The teachers can encourage stronger partnership with families by educating them. To build a stronger partnership, they both need each other. Educate parents mean to provide, equip them how they can help their kids at home and openly let them know what the teachers are doing at school.

(Clarification questions) Specifically, how can teachers educate families? In what ways do families and teachers need each other? Please give me some examples?

- Teachers need to let parent know how the school is doing. What the kids are doing at school. How do they behave. Provide the counseling class, booklets related to school programs or activities to parents, etc. Since kids learning styles are different, so parent and teacher need to exchange ideas how to fulfill the need of their learning. Keep each other inform each day from and to school.

9) What can families do to encourage stronger partnerships with teachers?

- The families also can encourage stronger partnership with teachers in many different ways. They can involve with school activities, help their children doing home works, read

with them, attend school meeting related to their child progress, pay a visit to their classroom once in a while, etc…

10) In what way has your involvement in the church helped in preparing your child for school?

- The church is the place where people young and old find spiritual and physical release. In this sense, church is seeking to meet the need of the people in the community. We provide our child in tutoring, counseling, and encouraging. We prepare them to be a responsible person. A person who can be trust, care and share…We help prepare in building their character, which I believe, it is the most important part that the US school system need today.

(Clarification question) Why is building character among our youth important? How does "building character" relate to education?

- As parent I trained my kids up in the ways that they should be. These included good habit and good character. When good habit and good character are developed in kid's mind and heart, I experienced that would help them a lot to endure the pressure and hardship they encountered at school and also in the society when they grow up. Character, to me can be defined as a strong, honest and courage. Because in today society, wherever you are, at work, school, business or at home; you will see and hear about how people are cheating, stealing, lying and killing each others. These problems are growing without ceasing and they affect everyone else who live around them every day. People are losing their characters. How can I send my child to school while friends are shooting friends? Teachers are being bribed and not doing what they suppose to do as teachers? Students are losing their self esteem and fear. They are losing their personal qualities. Therefore, characteristics are very important related to education.

Appendix F

Timeframe of Data Collection and Analysis

Date	**Activity**	**Data Collection Method**	**Analytic Method**
January – December 2009	Review literature on Cambodian Americans, Southeast Asian educational experiences, and family-school partnerships in education	Assemble literature	Literature review
July 2010 – August 2011	Probe specific issues	Begin ethnographic interviews with family members Continue data collection until all participants have been interviewed or saturation has been reached	Grounded theory Constant comparison as method for coding, analysis, and interpretation Look for themes to emerge from interview data
January – May 2012	Draft dissertation Discuss results with participants		Member checking