Engaging Youth to Change Their School Environment: A Photovoice with Hmong Youth

Ia Vang
Pacific University

Follow this and additional works at: http://commons.pacificu.edu/cassoc
Part of the Public Health Commons

Recommended Citation
Vang, Ia, "Engaging Youth to Change Their School Environment: A Photovoice with Hmong Youth" (2017). Social Sciences Capstone Projects. 44.
http://commons.pacificu.edu/cassoc/44

This Capstone Project is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Arts and Sciences at CommonKnowledge. It has been accepted for inclusion in Social Sciences Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of CommonKnowledge. For more information, please contact CommonKnowledge@pacificu.edu.
Engaging Youth to Change Their School Environment: A Photovoice with Hmong Youth

Abstract
Hmong high school students have a high rate of dropping out of school. Health and social factors in a student's life can affect his or her ability to learn and graduate. These factors influence educational success and school dropout rates due to school systems and social structures that are understood as the cause of the problem. Students' experience or witness of aggression at school or in their neighborhoods causes emotional harm. Violence or threats can lead them to feel tense, anxious, and scared. It can lead them to feel hopelessness and despair about life and in school which results in them being unsuccessful in school and withdrawing. The social environment at school either reinforces the negative perception of the outside world or helps students grow and learn to shape their own world. Hmong SUN Photovoice project is an after-school program that is affiliated with Oregon's Schools Uniting Neighborhood (SUN) in Multnomah County. Photovoice is a tool that gives a voice to underprivileged individuals such as Hmong youth because they have limited power due to poverty, gender, ethnicity, class, and culture. Photovoice was used as a tool previously by Hmong parents and high school youth to address policymakers and the community to understand the lived experiences of disadvantaged communities. Hmong SUN Photovoice will provide Hmong youth the opportunity to develop their personal and social identities and an instrument in building social competency. This program will bring the realities of the students experiences to the public and policy makers to urge changes in school environments. By the end of the school year, students will be able to identify issues within their immediate environment, thus becoming community change agents and improving graduation rates among Hmong students.

Document Type
Capstone Project

Department
Sociology, Anthropology, Social Work and Public Health

Subject Categories
Public Health

Rights
Terms of use for work posted in CommonKnowledge.
Engaging Youth to Change Their School Environment: A Photovoice with Hmong Youth

Ia Vang
2043 College Way, UC #3847
Pacific University
Forest Grove, OR
Vang1560@pacificu.edu

May 5, 2017

Hmong high school students have a high rate of dropping out of school. Health and social factors in a students life can affect his or her ability to learn and graduate. These factors influence educational success and school dropout rates due to school systems and social structures that are understood as the cause of the problem. Students’ experience or witness of aggression at school or in their neighborhoods causes emotional harm. Violence or threats can lead them to feel tense, anxious, and scared. It can lead them to feel hopelessness and despair about life and in school which results in them being unsuccessful in school and withdrawing. The social environment at school either reinforces the negative perception of the outside world or helps students grow and learn to shape their own world. Hmong SUN Photovoice project is an after-school program that is affiliated with Oregon’s Schools Uniting Neighborhood (SUN) in Multnomah County. Photovoice is a tool that gives a voice to underprivileged individuals such as Hmong youth because they have limited power due to poverty, gender, ethnicity, class, and culture. Photovoice was used as a tool previously by Hmong parents and high school youth to address policymakers and the community to understand the lived experiences of disadvantaged communities. Hmong SUN Photovoice will provide Hmong youth the opportunity to develop their personal and social identities and an instrument in building social competency. This program will bring the realities of the students experiences to the public and policy makers to urge changes in school environments. By the end of the school year, students will be able to identify issues within their immediate environment, thus becoming community change agents and improving graduation rates among Hmong students.
Population description

In the state of Oregon, there is a total population of 3,831,074 people and 735,334 in Multnomah County. According to the 2010 census, 47,950 people identify as Asians in Multnomah County. Asians are defined by the census as a person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent. The Asian population grew faster than any other race group in the United States from 2000 to 2010 and the Chinese population is one of the top five largest detailed Asian populations (Census, 2010). Within the Asian population in Multnomah County there is limited data available for the Hmong population.

This intervention will specifically target the Hmong youth population in Multnomah County. Public health statistics in the U.S. have been reported by racial or ethnic group, but health differences defined by socioeconomic status such as income and educational attainment have been examined far less frequently across groups as shown in Figure 3 (Smalkoski, Herther, Xiong, Ritsema, Vang, & Zheng, 2012). The Hmong population is a subgroup that has a higher risk of health disparity compared to the Asian population in general (Smalkoski et al., 2012). The myth of the “model minority” constructs a high level of education attainment and little barriers for achievement of Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs), and does great harm to the Hmong community. The Hmong community falls more in line with the Latino and African American communities in terms of education achievement. With limited data, according to the Census Bureau, 35% of Hmong families live below the poverty level. According to the Census Bureau, the Hmong Community had the lowest rates of educational attainment out of all Asian/Pacific Islander groups, with 61% of Hmong having received a high school diploma, and 14% having received a bachelor’s degree. Moreover, Hmong parents – many of whom are first generation refugees – are uneducated about the American school system and lack the understanding of how to be involved in their childrens academic lives. Without the proper family support, Hmong students face many barriers in the path to earning a high school degree and striving for higher education (Xiong & Lee, 2011).

The Hmong people reside all over the United States and they traced their ancestry as an ethnic minority in China. After migrating from China, the Hmong people resettled in the mountainous regions of Laos, Thailand, and North Vietnam (Wahedduddin, Singh, Culhane-Pera, & Gertner, 2010). The war in Vietnam from 1959 to 1975 forced the Hmong people to flee Laos as refugees and relocate in Thailand. Eventually the Hmong people migrated to the United States as political refugees. Hmong refugees who entered the United States after 1975 were pre-literate because most of them did not have a formal education. They lived in an agrarian society, meaning they had to start their educational development and their new life at the very base of society (Lee, 2005). Since the first wave of Hmong immigrants’ arrival to the U.S. over 40 years ago, the population has grown significantly. According to the U.S. Census, there are 260,073 Hmong among the 17.3 million Asian Americans residing in the United States. There are 45,443 Hmong in Minnesota, 33,791 in Wisconsin, 65,095 in California, and 2,101 in Oregon. Despite the increasing population of Asian Americans or Asians in the United States, Hmong have to rebuild their lives and there are a few studies that focus on Hmong demographics, gender issues, family life, and religious adaptation (Yang & Solheim, 2007). As of today, there are some Hmong still migrating, but there are no statistics to show what the migration pattern is as of 2016.
Figure 1&2. Trends in high school dropout and completion rates in the United States, Adapted from U.S. Department of Education (2013).

Figure 3. Hmong American, Asian American, and U.S. average data adapted from Progress 2050 (2015) and Ramakrishna & Ahmad (2014).
Statement of need

Youth violence is widespread in the United States. It is the third leading cause of death for young people between the ages of 15 and 24. Youth violence can start early and continue into young adulthood which affects the health and death is a result from youth violence. Many young people need medical care for violence-related injuries and some of injuries can lead to lasting disabilities. Exposure to youth violence and school violence can lead to wide array of negative health behaviors and outcomes, including alcohol abuse, drug use and suicide. Violence also affects the health of communities because it increases health care costs, decrease property values, and disrupts social services. Risk factors that can increase the risk of youth engaging in violence include: prior history of violence, drug, alcohol, or tobacco use, poor family functioning, and/or poverty in the community (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016).

Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) youth have generally been neglected as a demographic group for scholarly inquiry because AAPIs are stereotyped as “model minorities.” Policymakers generally viewed all AAPI as a homogenous group without severe violence issues and who do not come across serious social barriers (Lai, 2008). The ongoing dropout crisis and its disproportionate effects on racial and ethnic minority groups is one important and tragic manifestation of a negative school climate (APHA, 2016). Crime and delinquency in Southeast Asian immigrant communities have increased in the United States over the past twenty years, however the increasing rates of arrest and incarcerations in Southeast Asian communities are unknown due to very little research studies initiated, especially in Hmong communities (Xiong, Rettig, & Tuicomepee, 2008).

Hmong youth in the United States have a high rate of dropping out of school (Figure 1 & 2). Health and social factors in a students life can affect his or her ability to learn and graduate. These factors influence educational success and the risk of dropout due to school systems and social structures, which are understood as the cause of the problem.

Hmong youths’ experience or witness of aggression at school or in their neighborhoods causes emotional harm. Violence or threats can lead them to feel tense, anxious, and scared. It can lead them to feel hopelessness and despair about life and in school, which results them to being unsuccessful in school and withdrawing. The social environment at school either reinforces the negative outside world or helps students grow and learn to shape their own world (APHA, 2016).

The way the outside world affects young people because they are vulnerable to their environments, mainly because of their inability to impact the world around them. The cultural differences between home and school are used to explain as the root of many social and economic problems Hmong refugees faced in the United States. Cultural barriers were identified as the reason behind the high dropout rates among Hmong students in middle and high school. Youth who experience problems in school and with the law are those who have become disconnected from their families and culture (Lee, 2001 & 2008).

Cultural barriers marginalized low-income immigrant youth (Lee, 2008). Hmong youth struggle being Hmong-American because it means holding on to traditional cultural beliefs and values of Hmong culture, but they also want to be part of American society (Lo, 2015). Immigration usually result major changes in parent-child relationships. The relations between immigrant parents and children illustrate how vulnerable children are to these changes during the adolescent years (Xiong, Eliason, Detzner, & Cleveland, 2005). Immigrant parents may resist changes in their traditional values after years of living in
the United States. Many immigrant parents maintain their expectations, norms, rules and beliefs. As for adolescents, the lengths of time resettling in the country or those who are born in this country have a significant impact on their acceptance of traditional family values (Xiong et al., 2005).

Many Hmong students who are involved in delinquent behaviors belong to the second generation and have accepted these lower class values. These students are usually described as individuals who accepted individualism and freedom and spend more time with friends than family. These students have absences of quality relationship with parents and friends are served as representative families with the understanding and support they may have not have at home (Xiong, Rettig, & Tunicomepee, 2008).

Gender plays a key role in the experiences of Hmong youth, impacting academic performance, the kind of friends Hmong youth choose to have, and risky behaviors such as consuming alcohol and/or using drugs. There is a gender difference in academic performance due to the Hmong cultural expectations that differ for males and females. The Hmong culture states that girls are supposed to stay home and help their parents and the boys have more freedom to do what they want to do. Due to these cultural values, girls are more motivated and do much better than boys in academic performance (Lo, 2015).

Gender impacts how an individual makes connections with his/her peers which lead to risky behaviors such as alcohol consumption or using drugs. According to Lo, 13% of girls compared to 57% of boys have friends who have dropped out of high school and 10% compared to 52% have friends who joined or are currently in a gang.

Race and class discrimination in school affects academic performance. Hmong youth have been discriminated against by teachers, school administrators, or public authorities, which can initiate a violent response from youth in order to protect themselves (Lo, 2015). Discrimination by an adult with authority negatively impacts the opportunities and outcomes of Hmong youth.

Poverty is a challenge for the Hmong community and presents barriers for the youth that impact their academic performance and life choices. Hmong families that are living in poverty are situated in poor and unsafe neighborhoods, and attend schools where they do not feel safe because of the presence of potential of violence. In addition, poverty affects the educational opportunities and outcomes of Hmong youth (Lo, 2015).

Hmong youth are under pressure to find their place and fit within the American way of life, but they are discriminated against, pushed in the direction of crime and/or violence. Their struggles with poverty negatively impact their ability to do well in school.
Hmong SUN Photovoice

Review of interventions

There are many youth at risk of dropping out of school in inner city communities. It is a public health challenge to intervene quickly and effectively. There are numerous programs and strategies that have been developed over the past decade to address these issues and to prevent students from dropping out, however there are few studies that directly address the Hmong youth population. This review will examine different types of intervention and main features of these interventions in order to design an intervention that directly aims to increase high school graduation rate among Hmong youth in Multnomah County. Hmong SUN Photovoice aims to increase high school graduation rate among Hmong youth in Multnomah County through a photovoice project about school environment. This review will examine effective programs by using three main components: photovoice, cultural sensitivity and cultural values within the Hmong community, and approaches to identifying school environment.

Photovoice:

According to the creators of Photovoice, Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris, the program allows youth to document their community’s strengths and concerns, promote dialogue and knowledge about community issues through photographs and reach policy makers (2006). Hmong SUN Photovoice will be community-based participatory research (CBPR) because the input of student collaboration with different experiences and perspectives will develop interventions or policy changes that address community-identified needs. A project conducted on Hmong student’s perception of their family environment by Mao Dung, Veronica Deenath, and Zha Blong Xiong was a community-based intervention because they partnership with Hmong youth in 5th through 8th grade and used Photovoice. Photovoice was used in this project because Mao et al. believed low-income Hmong students face unique situations at home and educators who work with these students do not understand their lives outside of the school context. Their goals are to inform educators about the challenges low-income Hmong families face, empower educators to show more understanding, and be proactive to certain behavioral and academic signs when interacting with Hmong students and parents (Dung et al., 2012).

Photovoice is an effective methodology for engaging youth in addressing problems. It was used to decrease violence by increasing awareness on multiculturalism. A study found that a youth-centered form of CBPR used Photovoice to strengthen the voices and vision of marginalized communities and had found that youth were engaged and become agents in decreasing intergroup violence (Johansen & Le, 2012). Photovoice can help policy makers understand the lived experiences of disadvantaged communities and give a voice to underprivileged individuals. Hmong youth individuals will benefit the most because it can be used to make their voices heard and change their situation. Students will use video or photo images to capture parts of their environment and experiences and then share them with the public and policy makers to urge changes such as implementing after-school based programs or changes in school policies.

Cultural sensitivity and cultural values within Hmong community:

Hmong SUN Photovoice will be culturally sensitive for the Hmong community through the use Hmong tailored aspects and values of the program. According to Stacey Lee and Margaret Hawkins, community-based after-school programs that serve low-income Hmong youth can bridge the academic
and cultural barriers that marginalize Hmong youth (2008). The program created spaces where youth can express their Hmong and American identities. In the community-based after-school program, the staff was familiar of Hmong culture, history, and family structure and understanding of mainstream American culture in ways that allow them to connect to youths in ways that school do not (Lee & Hawkins, 2008).

An important element for working with racial ethnic communities is to include partners who are familiar or are members of that community (Small, Tiwari, & Huser, 2006). A project focusing on Hmong families with early adolescent children was conducted by Stephen Small, Geetika Tiwari, and Mary Huser was not as successful because of the researcher’s academic positions and non-Hmong ethnic background which created some difficulties working with the Hmong communities. To increase the project’s credibility with the Hmong community, the researchers hired a bilingual individual from the community to teach the family strengthening programs, recruit families, and conduct interviews (2006).

**Approaches to identifying School environment:**

Concept mapping integrates perspective of individuals with different experiences, interests, or capabilities into a general visual representation framework, and ranks the importance and feasibility of shared views. Concept mapping was used to facilitate participatory intervention building for a school-based, teacher-focused, positive youth development promotion program for Latino, Hmong, and Somali youth by developing statements, sorting statements into important connection and ranking them, mapping the statements on a 2-dimensional plane based on their relationship to develop the concept map, and then labeling the concepts. This study had a partnership with teachers, administrators, youth, parents, and community and university researchers and they determined that concept mapping was an effective tool for getting all participants engaged and into an agreement for each concept related to positive youth development (Allen, Schaleben-Boateng, Davey, Hang, & Pregament, 2015).

The SHOWeD method will be used to facilitate discussion of participant’s photos because it is commonly used in Photovoice studies. SHOWeD is a mnemonic for the following: what do you SEE? What is really HAPPENING? How does it relate to OUR lives? WHY does the situation exist? What can we DO about it? (Wang, 2016) The SHOWeD method was implemented in Johansen and Le’s project to facilitate discussion to engage youth in conversation by allowing the researchers to identify topics and developing a list of themes (2012). This method will be incorporated in Hmong SUN Photovoice to identify school environment themes and emotional reactions.

Hmong SUN Photovoice is a school based drop-out prevention program designed to address school environment. This program will integrate the use of visual research method, Photovoice which combines photography and group discussion in order to amplify the voices and visions of marginalized communities such as Hmong youths. The facilitator will incorporate concept mapping before photovoice to establish participation and agreement among all participants and use the SHOWeD method to make out recurring themes.
Program activities

Hmong SUN Photovoice aims to increase successful educational outcomes among Hmong youth in Multnomah County. Hmong SUN Photovoice project will be implemented in after-school programs through schools that are affiliated with Oregon’s Schools Uniting Neighborhood (SUN), a community hub. This program will adapt the photovoice method to provide youth the opportunity to develop their personal and social identities and can be instrumental in building social competency. Hmong SUN photovoice will serve low-income Hmong youth and can bridge the academic and cultural barriers that marginalize Hmong youth. The program will create spaces where youth can express their Hmong and American identities (Lee & Hawkins, 2008). In the community-based after-school program, the staff will be familiar with Hmong culture, history, and family structure, and understanding of mainstream American culture. In ways that allow them to connect to youths in ways that schools do not (Lee & Hawkins, 2008).

Hmong SUN Photovoice will work with SUN to recruit participants; in month two, the first educational session will occur. Facilitator will use concept mapping to get all participants engaged and into an agreement on issues (Allen et al, 2015). This process will take two to three sessions depending on the student’s ability to identifying issues and consensus. To carry out the photovoice project: in month 4, the facilitator will train students the structure and the photovoice process, photography, photography ethics, consents, and safety and education on issues from the project. The facilitator will use the SHOWeD method to lead group discussion with the student. The SHOWeD method will help students tell powerful stories about their photographs. The facilitator will assist students to select photos and write captions about the photos for the photovoice exhibition, which will be showcase at Reynolds High school.

In order to achieve successful educational outcome among Hmong youth in Multnomah County, the program will:
- Initiate a change effort through the help of school staffs and administrators as well as partnerships among school districts after the completion of the Photovoice exhibition.
- The Photovoice exhibition will allow Hmong students to share their everyday life experiences with the community to increase support by the end of the exhibition.
- Increase in community support to develop change by the end of 2018

By the end of the Hmong SUN Photovoice, we anticipate an increase in high school graduation rate among Hmong youth in Multnomah County. Specifically:
- 90% of the students will be able to identify issues within their immediate environment by the end of the project
- By the end of the Hmong SUN Photovoice project, all students will be an advocate to peers and the community

The logic model on the following page demonstrates the relationships among program components.
### Logic model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inputs / Resources</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
<th>Short-term outcomes</th>
<th>Long-term outcomes</th>
<th>Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrative support Partnership and collaboration with Oregon’s SUN school</td>
<td>Recruit Students from SUN high school in the Multnomah County</td>
<td>The number of students who will be participating</td>
<td>Academic performance</td>
<td></td>
<td>Change educational outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff, program facilitators and researchers</td>
<td>Recruit 2 facilitator: culturally specific to the community</td>
<td>Number of people trained</td>
<td>Students committed to learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify students who are Hmong and are able to participate (obtain consent)</td>
<td>Train both facilitator how to run discussion group using the SHOWeD method and analyze qualitative data and coding transcript</td>
<td>Transcripts</td>
<td>Change in students knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behavior regarding to school violence</td>
<td>Healthy family and social relationship</td>
<td>Improve outcomes in adulthood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program resources: Funding, program manuals, Photovoice materials: cameras and photo supplies</td>
<td>Facilitator will train students: introduction to structure and Photovoice process, photography, photography ethics, consent, and safety and educate on issues from the project</td>
<td>The number of photos presented for discussion</td>
<td>Students will use new knowledge and skills to persuade others in their environment to change</td>
<td>Students contributing to community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facilitator will use the SHOWeD method to lead the discussion group with students and interpret the photos taken by students and categorize themes and quotes</td>
<td>Students knowledge and participation in discussions</td>
<td>Better relationship between student and teacher</td>
<td>Change quality of teaching and learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The facilitator will assist students to select photos and write captions about the photo for the Photovoice exhibit</td>
<td>The pre and final draft of work of students</td>
<td></td>
<td>Parent and other community members contribute to student success</td>
<td>Implement community involvement strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reynolds high school will be the venue to showcase the youth’s photographs</td>
<td>The exhibit of Photovoice</td>
<td>Create a sense of urgency, possibility, and equity about district wide reform: barriers to Hmong graduation identified</td>
<td>Policy change goals identified</td>
<td>Develop district and community support for change. Policy implemented to increase graduation rate among Hmong students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


