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ADOLESCENT REFUGEES:

An Ethnographic Study of Vietnamese Youth in U.S. Schools

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ADOLESCENT REFUGEES:
An Ethnographic Study of Vietnamese Youth in U.S. Schools

By
Barbara J. Dillinger

A THESIS

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Family and Child Ecology

1990

ABSTRACT

ADOLESCENT REFUGEES: An Ethnographic Study of Vietnamese Youth in U.S. Schools

By

Barbara J. Dillinger

The purpose of this ethnographic study of a group of adolescent Vietnamese refugee students in a West Michigan ESL/Bilingual Program was to explore and describe pre-migration, migration, and post-migration factors which could impact adaptation and educational performance. Multiple methods of data collection were utilized, particularly participant observation, surveys, and life histories. It was found that the recent wave of unaccompanied minors and Amerasians are presenting the academic and behavioral problems in the classroom which may be due to such variables as lack of previous education, fatherless homes, more time spent under communist system which is undermining traditional Vietnamese values, growing up on the streets, longer periods of time spent in refugee camps, psycho-social problems, and learning disabilities. For the Amerasians additional problems of early loss of both parents and growing up under discrimination and abuse may be contributing factors to the serious problems they tend to present in the classroom.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the West Michigan ESL/Bilingual Program and, in particular, the ESL teachers for being so willing and open to the intrusion of research into their classrooms. They willingly gave their time and effort to each step of the research study. They set aside class time for surveys and life history assignments, were always ready and willing to answer questions, and seemed undaunted by the presence of a researcher observing and feverishly taking notes in the back of their classes.

I would like to thank the Vietnamese paraprofessionals who served as volunteer assistants in the roles of translators, interviewers, and culture brokers. Their readiness to answer questions, clarify issues, and to give of their time, particularly in the tiring task of translation of instruments and data, were very much appreciated. This research study would not have been possible without their input and help.

I would like to thank the students in the West Michigan ESL/Bilingual Program for their participation and for the effort they put forth in completing the surveys and doing the life histories. Their writings and drawings are beautiful and open expressions of their experiences and feelings and are the very essence of this study.

I would like to thank Bob Clarke and Leslie Davis for their generous help in printing this thesis and for the

computer, without which this project would have been overwhelming, if not impossible!

I would also like to thank my guidance committee, Dr. Linda Nelson, Dr. Lillian Phenice, and Dr. Robert Griffore, for their help and their willingness to work with me on this project. Their invaluable contributions began from the start when this study was in its proposal stage, particularly by helping me to reduce the design to a more practical, focused, and "researchable" one. I would especially like to thank my advisor, Dr. Nelson, for her positive and cheerful spirit, ready availability, practical help, support, encouragement, interest, and shared excitement in the discoveries. Her investment has resulted in not only a grateful student, but a convert to her belief in the value of ethnography.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In a world plagued by periodic upheavals, whole populations are invariably caught up in disastrous situations. A frequent result is refugee migration. Refugees are as old as human history, but it has been since World War II that refugee migrations have reached massive and world-wide proportions, prompting the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to poignantly call this the "century of the uprooted" (UNHCR, 1981 p. 5).

Like a kaleidoscope, refugee migrations continuously change the face of the globe. At times they strain the goodwill and resources of receiving countries. No continent or country has been left unaffected, and the United States is no exception. For more than two centuries, a continuous human stream has come to this country from all over the world; around 54 million immigrants have come since the time of the pilgrims (Rumbaut, 1985). In 1988 alone, out of the 12 million people who sought asylum, one million were resettled in the United States (UNHCR, 1988).

Ironically, in spite of the above givens, a major myth plagues the field of refugee research -- that refugee migrations are unique and nonrecurring events. Because of this myth, refugee research is sporadic, and refugee migrations are not planned for. Thus, past experiences that could prove valuable in planning for the needs of current

and future refugee groups are not utilized (Stein, 1986). Too often the result is the development of programs and services that are ineffectual and/or inappropriate.

One of the largest refugee movements in modern history has been the exodus from Southeast Asia. More than one and one half million men, women, and children have fled the region in search of asylum. Over 856,500 of these have been resettled in the United States (UNHCR, 1989). A striking demographic feature is the "disproportionate share of young people" within this population (Nidorf, 1985, p. 392). A study in San Diego county revealed that the median age is 18, compared to the median age of 31 for the rest of the American population (Rumbaut, 1985). In 1982, of the total number of Southeast Asian refugees admitted to the United States, 50.1% were 19 years old or younger (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 1982).

In spite of their high percentage, Southeast Asian youth have not been studied as much as adults (Ben-Porath, 1987; Looney, Rahe, Harding, Ward, & Liu, 1979). In fact, Huyck & Fields (1981) suggest that refugee children, in general, are the most neglected part of the refugee population. The lack of knowledge and hard data create a void in the research which, in turn, affects service to these young people and their families.

Available clinical evidence shows that these young people, particularly those who left Southeast Asia after 1979, are manifesting adjustment, trauma, and developmental

disorders (Carlin, 1986; Westermeyer, 1986a). Because of their admirable strengths, there is danger of overlooking their problems and of misinterpreting the cause and meaning of those problems (Nidorf, 1985). In addition, refugee youths who are successful are held up and displayed in the political and journalistic realms, overshadowing those who are struggling and falling through the cracks of the system (Huyck & Fields, 1981).

Like all refugees, refugee youth must find a way to cope with the "crisis of loss" involving home and homeland, family and friends, meaningful sources of identity and validation. At the same time they must cope with the "crisis of load" which is the innumerable stressors from new social and environmental demands (Rumbaut, 1985, p. 435). These children and adolescents are affected in different ways than their elders and face special challenges and difficulties. As Nidorf (1985) notes, "the psychological impact and interpretation of the 'refugee experience' is always dependent on the age and stage of development of the survivor" (p. 310).

Besides age, other differences exist among refugees. For example, while Eastern European and Southeast Asian refugees have similar adaptational difficulties and problems (Lin, 1986), Southeast Asians are "culturally, racially and ethnically vastly different from their hosts, they come from less-developed countries, at greatly different stages of development" (Stein, 1986, p.13).

And, among the Southeast Asians themselves, there is a myriad of differences: class and socioeconomic levels, ethnicity, religion, language, differences between those who left before 1979 and those who left after 1979, and individual variables such as biological-physiological, personality, perception and meaning, family structure and system, degree of trauma experienced. All these factors combine to create differences in experience and differences in degree and kind of impact.

Most refugee youth depend on the English as a Second Language (ESL) and bilingual classes to facilitate the process of adaptation to this strange and foreign society. For these classes to be effective in this regard, it is essential that each program and its individual teachers assess their students' multiple and complex needs (Paul, 1986). This necessarily involves the collection of data not usually considered in assessment (Carlin, 1986) and should be based on a "contextualized theory of development" (Nidorf, 1985, p. 391) which explores pre-migration, migration, and post-migration factors. It should also explore the student's and his/her family's perception and meaning of their current situation because, as Thomas (1949) noted, "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (p.301).

Need for the Study

Preliminary inquiries regarding the assessment of refugee students in area schools revealed a limited focus:

English language proficiency, reading comprehension, and math skills. A void was noted regarding other key areas that could impact academic performance and successful adaptation. The relevance of this void may be manifested in the frequent difficulties -- such as cultural misunderstandings, divergent expectations, and academic and behavior problems -- encountered by refugee students and the school personnel who work with them (G. Martin, personal communication, March, 1989). These difficulties indicate a need for greater understanding of the environmental factors surrounding and impacting these youths.

Significance to Policy and Planning

This study utilized a multi-method ethnographic research approach to explore some of the environments that may be impacting and interacting with the refugee student's academic performance and adaptation. Since developmental issues are different for children at various ages, and since adolescence is considered to be an especially critical period of development (Bettelheim, 1965; Erickson, 1963, 1968; Tobin & Friedman 1984), the focus of this study was on adolescent refugees, particularly those from Vietnam. Vietnamese are chosen as the focus group because of their high percentage in area schools (Table 1).

Research with this population is fraught with difficulty with this. Concerns regarding the testing of minorities must be thoughtfully and carefully weighed since

Table 1: Summary of Enrollment*

Race	Ethnic Group	Total
Asian	Vietnamese	46
	Chinese	6
	Korean	5
	Cambodian	3
	Laotian	1
Latin American	Mexican	4
	Puerto Rican	4
	Cuban	1
	Guatemalan	1
Middle Eastern	Arabic	4
	Pakistani	1
European	Dutch	1
	German	1
	Hungarian	1
	Rumanian	1
		<u>80</u>

* Report presented to Superintendent's Advisory ^{Council} Counsel,
October, 1989.

refugees automatically become a minority group upon resettlement (Williams, 1987). Language barriers impede communication, requiring the use of translators. In addition, available assessment tests, even if translated, may lack appropriateness to the refugee students' backgrounds and experiences as well as to their current situation.

Rumbaut (1985) suggests that there is a need for prevention-oriented research and practice with refugees. This research project was guided by such an orientation. One of the desired outcomes of this study is to sensitize school personnel to the needs of the recently arrived refugee students and, thus, to contribute to the continued development of helpful programs for these students within the school.

School counselors, teachers, parents, mental health workers, and general health providers can make the process of adjustment and passage to adulthood smoother for these young people by becoming more aware of the developmental and environmental hurdles confronting them.

Contribution to Knowledge and Theory

In order to understand the behavior of refugee youths, in order to make sense of the forces impacting them, and in order to extract from their experiences, research studies on these young people must be placed within a broader theoretical framework by "letting theory inform our data, and, ultimately, allowing our data to inform theory" (MacCleod, 1987, p. 8).

This study was guided by a tripartite framework: the Ecological Systems Model, Developmental Theory, and Symbolic Interaction Theory. Within this framework there was an integration of refugee research, particularly as it relates to adolescents and their families.

The combination of these three theories provided concepts, assumptions, and postulates that seemed to be appropriate in an exploratory study of refugee adolescents. The data gathered, in turn, may contribute to these theories by exploring their usefulness in the study of refugees.

For example, understanding may be gained by exploring refugee students' definitions of their situations -- the meanings and perceptions of their stressors and of the total upheaval of their lives. Subjective perceptions may vary from viewing the circumstances as a challenge and opportunity for growth, to viewing the circumstances as hopeless, too difficult, or unmanageable. Either perception can make a profound impact on a refugee youth's adaptation, academic performance, and mastery of developmental tasks.

The theories contributing to the framework of this study may be a useful combination for refugee research. Much of the research seems to be at a macro-social level. Some focuses on the individual. But there seems to be a void in the study of the refugee child and family in a holistic way, particularly the impact of developmental tasks in combination with stressors, demands, and

resources. Application of the concepts of "adolescent-to-family fit," "adolescent-to-community fit," and "family-to-community fit" (McCubbin & Patterson, 1986) seems appropriate with this population and provided direction for this study.

Purpose of the Study

1. To explore and describe background experiences and current situations of a group of adolescent Vietnamese. The focus is on pre-migration, migration, and post-migration factors which may impact adjustment/adaptation and educational performance.

2. To explore the use of methods which may contribute to a holistic understanding of Vietnamese students by school personnel. It is hoped that such understanding will contribute toward the continued development of programs which strive to help refugee students optimize their abilities and help to facilitate their adaptation to the school systems and society at large.

Guiding Research Questions

1. What are the background experiences and current situations of these Vietnamese students?

2. To what extent can multiple research approaches add to understanding the situation of adolescent Vietnamese refugees in U.S. schools?

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Cultural differences become cultural handicaps when the individual moves out of the culture or subculture in which he or she was reared and endeavors to function, compete or succeed within another culture (Anastasi, 1976, p. 346).

To form a knowledge base for this study a review of the literature was conducted, focusing on refugee research and instrumentation.

Refugee Research

Uprooting and the subsequent efforts at adaptation are complex, multi-determined processes affecting numerous aspects of an individual's functioning. Residential migration, both intranational and international, adversely affects, at least temporarily, the social and emotional well-being of children (Downie, 1953; Johnson, 1988; Johnson & McCutcheon, 1980; Kantor, 1965 & 1969; Pederson & Sullivan, 1964; Stubblefield, 1965; Switzer, Hirschberg, & Meyers, 1961; Werkman, 1978 & 1979; Werkman, Farley, Butler, & Quayhagen, 1981). Migration has been associated with an increase in physical illness (Evans, 1987; Kasl & Berkman, 1983; King & Locke, 1987; Sheers & Lusty, 1987) and an increase in psychopathology (Berry, 1986; Berry & Kim, 1986; Malzberg & Lee, 1956; Tyhurst, 1971; Westermeyer, 1986b).

According to Evans (1987) migrants tend to have two

characteristics that can greatly affect the demand for services at the local level: they tend to be young and they tend to cluster in small geographic areas. The fact that they are young suggests that they will need a different set of education, health, and other services than the general population. The fact that they are geographically clustered suggests that the capabilities of schools, social services, and health care will tend to be overly stressed in the cluster areas.

The Refugee Experience

Involuntary migration or "coerced homelessness" (Keller, 1975) is the definitive psycho-social feature of the refugee (Ben-Porath, 1987; Carlin, 1986; Stein, 1986). Involuntary migration stems from the conclusion that life is no longer bearable in one's homeland. This sets the refugee apart from other immigrants. According to migration theory, immigrants are pulled to new lands, while refugees are pushed out of their homelands (Kunz, 1981). Refugees, unlike other immigrants, do not have the choice of returning home if they cannot cope with living in the new land.

According to Lin (1986) refugees leave their homelands in varying degrees of unpreparedness, experience different kinds of pre-migration and migration trauma, and embrace their new lives with either enthusiasm or hesitation. Many have unrealistic expectations of their new lives (Stein, 1986). These expectations play key roles in the refugee's

adaptation and behavior during resettlement.

Lin (1986) lists six sources of stress for the refugee: 1) multiple and significant losses, 2) social isolation due to disruption of one's social support network, difficulties making new connections, and/or creating relationship problems by displacing anger or guilt onto sponsors or other refugees, 3) status inconsistencies such as having to accept jobs of much lower status than previously held, 4) culture shock, 5) accelerated modernization, and 6) minority status.

For the refugee, stressors encountered prior to and during migration can take a substantial emotional toll that may effect behavior for years to come (Ben-Porath, 1987). Keller (1975) discovered three residual psychological characteristics that are likely to erupt: guilt, invulnerability, and aggressiveness.

Part of the refugee experience involves going through the stages of intercultural adaptation and the stages of grief simultaneously (Biagini, 1989; Rumbaut, 1985). In stage one, the "honeymoon stage" (Oberg, 1966) of intercultural adaptation, the refugee experiences euphoria and fascination mixed with numbness, shock, and disbelief. In stage two, referred to as the disintegration or crisis stage of intercultural adaptation, the refugee experiences culture shock such as overwhelming feelings of anxiety and frustration over everyday activities with exile shock which is the delayed realization that almost everything that

matters is beyond control (Biagini, 1989; Rumbaut, 1985). Common reactions are the absent-minded stare, feelings of helplessness, over-dependence on one's own language-cultural group, fits of anger over minor frustrations, great concerns over minor pains, and a terrible longing to be back home (Oberg, 1966).

In stage three, the reintegration stage, an attempt is made to begin working out a fit between self and the new environment. The refugee experiences hostility and frustration over clash of values along with anger and frustration with coping with life in general. In stage four, the autonomy stage, one begins to gain some knowledge of the language and to open up to the new cultural environment and not be so dependent on own language-cultural group. The refugee begins to accept and appreciate cultural similarities and differences along with a sense of hopefulness. In stage five, the adaptation stage, the refugee becomes bicultural, fully accepting and drawing nourishment from both cultures. This is mixed, however, with recurrent sadness over irretrievable losses.

Refugee Families and Youth

The extended family unit tends to be the single strongest influence in the lives of refugees, particularly for Southeast Asians (Santopietro & Lynch, 1980). Nicassio (1983) found that refugees who lacked familial support were at high risk for psychopathology, illustrating the

crucial role played by the family in refugee migration.

Among the Southeast Asians extended families are of great importance. Loss of extended family networks resulted not only before and during migration, but extended family units were also split during resettlement (Brown, 1982; Timberlake & Cook, 1984). The result has been the creation of new "families" of distant relatives, friends, and even strangers who were also refugees. These networks serve many of the functions of the extended family.

Refugee children and adolescents experience difficulties and hardships far beyond those of a normally developing child (Ben-Porath, 1987; Carlin, 1986; Nidorf, 1985). Looney (1979) found that most adolescent refugees face problems associated with suffering from cold and hunger, broken families, living with anxious adults, enduring long and mostly boring stays in refugee camps, and having to cope with small groups of bored troublemakers in those camps. Unaccompanied minors face all these difficulties alone, lacking the support and comfort from a family. Harding & Looney (1977) found that many of the Vietnamese children received strong emotional support from the multi-generational families and they adapted well to their new environment. However, children separated from their families demonstrated increased emotional vulnerability. Tran (1978) notes that, while some of the problems faced by Vietnamese refugee youths are intrapsychic, such as depression, anxiety, or psychotic breakdown, the majority of the

problems are extrapsychic, such as problems in social adjustment, family conflicts, and school and job difficulties.

Instrumentation

A review of the literature suggests that research and testing have some unique challenges with Southeast Asians in the United States. Silverman (1985, p. 178-179) provides a list of some of the problems:

1. The standardization of tests and measurements and their cultural relevance across populations.
2. The establishment of normative baseline rates for levels of functioning and dysfunctioning.
3. The categorization of the unique expression of psychological symptoms and response styles. Related to this would be the use of culturally specific coping skills.
4. The development of culturally relevant interventions and their generalizability to other settings.
5. The quantification of the effects of family and community as mediating variables.

Concerns regarding the psychological testing of minorities have been debated since the 1960's. A historical review of the controversy reveals past abuses in such testing. An underlying theme of the debate is that such tests are culturally biased (Cleary, Humphreys & Kendrick, 1975; Cordes, 1986; Jackson, 1975; Lambert, 1981). Tests are seen as gatekeepers, allowing the dominant culture access to important opportunities in the culture, while those from minority cultures are thought to

be automatically penalized by the tests. The scores obtained on groups of minorities are believed to be reflective of the test developer's prejudices rather than the ability of the people being tested.

Obviously caution is warranted when doing research and testing across cultures. At the same time, it is important to recognize that the solution is not the elimination of tests. Research and testing can provide a BRIDGE to opportunity, if used appropriately (Williams, 1987). Researchers and practitioners should ensure that their assessment methods result in the best possible programs and services and are not used to discriminate against any individual or group.

Guidelines for testing have been provided by a number of cross-cultural researchers. Jenson (1980, p. 637) provided some ideas on how to make tests less "culture loaded" and more "culture reduced":

<u>CULTURE LOADED</u>	<u>CULTURE REDUCED</u>
Paper-and-pencil tests	Performance tests
Printed instruction	Oral instruction
No preliminary practice	Preliminary practice
Reading required	Purely pictorial
Pictorial (objects)	Abstract figural
Written response	Oral response
Separate answer sheet	Answers written on test
Language	Nonlanguage
Speed tests	Power tests
Specific factual knowledge	Abstract reasoning
Difficulty based on rarity of content	Difficulty based on complexity of relation education

Even when a test is "culture reduced," bias may still exist. Brislin, Lonner and Thorndike (1973) caution that,

in cross-cultural applications, non-verbal, manipulative, and performance tests require as much careful adaptation as verbal tests. Some researchers and practitioners have suggested that cross-cultural assessments be administered by a professional with cross-cultural understanding -- preferably by a bilingual-bicultural professional (Irwin & Madden, 1986; Kinzie, Sack, Angell, Manson, & Rath, 1986; Williams, 1987). The reason is that misinterpretations result when the tester and the testee come from different backgrounds and do not understand the norms of the other. Affective expressions are especially susceptible to cross-cultural misinterpretations (Cuellar, 1982).

Language is a major barrier impeding assessment of refugee students and requires the use of translation for written and oral communication. Brislin et al. (1973, p. 33) provided rules for writing translatable English:

1. Use short, simple sentences of less than 16 words.
2. Employ the active rather than passive voice.
3. Repeat nouns instead of using pronouns.
4. Avoid metaphors and colloquialisms.
5. Avoid the subjective mode (i.e. verbs with could or would).
6. Avoid adverbs and prepositions telling "where" or "when."
7. Avoid possessive forms where possible.
8. Use specific rather than general terms.
9. Avoid sentences with two different verbs if they suggest different actions.
10. Avoid words that indicate vagueness regarding some event or thing (e.g., probably and frequently).

The original document to be translated from English to another language should be written in simple,

third-grade level English. Even then, one must be open to revisions since some sentences, no matter how simple, may be untranslatable (Brislin et al., 1973).

One also needs to be selective in the choice of translators. Problems, some of which have been detrimental to subjects/patients, have arisen from the use of translators who have not been properly screened and sufficiently trained (Westermeyer, 1986a).

Content is another major issue when translating across cultures. A loss of linguistic meaning can result when translating from one language to another. Bernard (1988) advocated the use of back translation (see below) as a way to check for linguistic equivalence. Brislin (1980) suggested four ways to translate an instrument adequately:

1. Back Translation: This involves having a bilingual person translate the test into the target language and then having another bilingual person translate it from the target language back to the original language. This helps the test developer to locate any discrepancies.

2. Bilingual Technique: This is a step following back translation in which the two tests are given to a group of bilingual individuals to determine if there are any discrepancies in their responses between the two versions. This is an important step since the back translation may obtain identical linguistic meaning but not identical psychological meaning.

3. Committee of Bilinguals: A group of bilinguals do

the translating rather than an individual translator. This helps to eliminate any individual errors.

4. Pre-Testing: The completed instrument is pre-tested to insure that the material is understandable to the group for whom it is intended.

Translating an instrument adequately is vital in any study. However, one must be alert to the fact that true equivalency is never achieved. "Since language is not only a means of communication but a way of perceiving and classifying the world of experience, exact translation from one language to another is virtually impossible" (Paul, 1953, p. 448).

A major difficulty in the assessment of refugee students from Southeast Asia is that available tests may be inappropriate to their background and current situation. Compared to other immigrant groups, the new wave of Southeast Asians are some of the most culturally distant from their host country (Stein, 1986). This factor, along with the myriad of differences within the Southeast Asian population itself, creates a complex task with regard to assessment.

Several researchers and practitioners have suggested that the best way to screen for errors in research and assessment with this population is to rely on many different techniques and sources of information rather than just one (Carlin, 1986; Irwin & Madden, 1986; Nidorf, 1985; Williams, 1987). Their common recommendations are that

multiple methods should be used for research and testing, and that data and analysis must allow for the influence of specific cultural and environmental variables. Utilizing a multi-method ethnographic research design which explores cultural and environmental variables may be a foundational step toward helping refugee students optimize their abilities and helping to facilitate their adaptation to the school systems and to society at large.

Summary

Uprooting and adaptation are complex processes which affect many aspects of an individual's functioning. Refugees differ from other immigrants due to the involuntary nature of their migration. They must simultaneously work through the stages of intercultural adaptation and the stages of grief. The refugee family becomes a major source of support and belongingness during immigration. Unaccompanied children and adolescents must deal with the same hardships as other refugees, only without family comfort and support.

In assessment, testing, and the designing of research instruments to be used with refugee youth, a number of issues must be carefully weighed, such as making sure the instruments are as culture-reduced as possible, are relevant to the background and experience of the refugee, are adequately translated, and are screened for errors through the use of multiple methods.

Chapter 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Researchers and practitioners have called for a contextual approach to assessment and practice with refugee children and adolescents (Carlin & Sokoloff, 1985; Irwin & Madden, 1986; Kinzie, 1985; Lin, 1986; Nidorf, 1985). Given the complexity of the refugee youth's experience and development, it was assumed that no one theory can adequately provide a foundation for research, policy or, practice with this population. Therefore, a tripartite framework was developed for this study, utilizing the ecological model, developmental theory and symbolic interaction theory. It was further assumed that multiple methods of data collection, rather than a single method, were necessary for providing a holistic picture of refugee youth. Thus, three methods were chosen: participant observation, surveys and the life history method. This chapter will explore the design and methodology utilized in this study.

Theoretical Framework

The Ecological Systems Model seems to be the most promising and appropriate in a study of refugee adolescents since it has a contextual focus and is flexible and broad enough to integrate multiple theories and a multi-disciplinary approach. A framework able to accommodate a multi-disciplinary perspective is important in a study of

refugees since refugee research is not integrated and is widely scattered through many fields and disciplines, e.g., sociology, political science, education, anthropology, public health, relief and development, law, economics, social work, pediatrics, psychiatry (Stein 1986). Therefore, the Ecological Systems Model was chosen as the guiding conceptual framework for this study.

The Ecological Systems Model

The Ecological Systems Model begins with a broad holistic view before narrowing the field of inquiry to an indepth look at the problem (Auerswald 1971; Bubolz, Eicher, & Sontag, 1979). This approach emphasizes the properties of state and change in the individual, family, and their environments (Andrews, Bubolz, & Paolucci, 1980; Herrin & Wright 1988). Change is viewed holistically by focusing on both the maintenance/regulation of the status quo and on change, adaptation, and dynamics (M. Bubolz, personal communication, April, 1989).

This holistic view of change is relevant in a study of refugee youths because change is one of the definitive features of the refugee experience (Ben-Porath, 1987; Keller, 1975; Landau, 1982; Lin, 1986; Stein, 1979, 1986; Szapocznik & Cohen, 1986; Timberlake & Cook, 1984). These changes involve multiple losses, (Rumbaut, 1985; Westermeyer, 1986b), changes in family (Gold, 1989; Landau, 1982; Lappin & Scott, 1982), and changes in culture, identity, climate, status, social-relational skills, language,

perception, and even food and clothing (Anderson, n.d.; Aronowitz, 1984; Berry, 1986; Carlin, 1979, 1986; Gilzow, 1989; Huyck & Fields, 1981; Lin, 1986; Nidorf, 1985; Timberlake & Cook, 1984). Refugee youths and their families face the challenge of maintaining what is left of the status quo, e.g., retaining aspects of their culture, identity, family rules, and systems, while changing and adapting to the demands and expectations of a different country, a different culture, a different way of life.

The following are the ecological assumptions that underlie this study. It is assumed that phenomena must be examined holistically -- in their wholeness of interaction and interdependence (Andrews et al., 1980; Bubolz et al., 1979; Hook & Paolucci, 1970), and that humans are part of the total life system and cannot be considered apart from all other living systems and environments surrounding them (Andrews et al., 1980; Hook & Paolucci, 1970). Humans are actors/proactors as well as reactors and are oriented toward satisfying needs at all levels-- physical, social, emotional. Thus, human behavior is assumed to be based on biological-physiological, psychosocial, and sociocultural influences.

It is assumed that the nature of families is to carry out physical survival and maintenance functions as well as psycho-social-cultural functions (Andrews et al., 1980). The family is a cybernetic system in which the action of one unit affects the other parts (Kantor & Lehr, 1975), and

that, as a system, the family requires both change and stability (Andrews et al., 1980; Kantor & Lehr, 1975).

Three dimensions of the family which are assumed to influence its capacity to deal with stress and change are:

1) family cohesion, which is the degree of closeness/emotional bonding and individual autonomy within the family system (Kantor & Lehr, 1975; Olson, Russell & Sprenkle, 1983; Olson, Sprenkle & Russell, 1979), 2) family adaptability, which is the ability to change family power structures, role relationships, and relationship rules in response to stress or change (Kantor & Lehr, 1975), and 3) family resources and capital, which are the biopsychosocial strengths of the family and the environmental and economic resources available to them (Doherty & Campbell, 1988; Melson, 1980). It is also assumed that feedback and feedforward processes are needed for goal-directed adaptation, and that families differ in degree of adaptability (Kantor & Lehr, 1975). Furthermore, family systems are relatively open systems and need interactions with other systems and environments in order to be viable. Families differ in degree of openness and boundary maintenance (Kantor & Lehr, 1975).

The following are the ecological postulates that guided this study. Stress emerges when demands (needs) are unmet and/or when demands exceed resources/capabilities (McCubbin & Patterson, 1986). Adaptation is achieved through reciprocal relationships, i.e., the "fit" between

the individual and family and their environments. Adolescent-to-family fit is achieved when the needs of the adolescent are met by the family and the needs of the family are met, in part, by the adolescent member. Adolescent-to-community fit is sought through reciprocal relationships in which the adolescent's capabilities are used to meet the community demands and community resources are available for the adolescent's needs. Family-to-community fit is sought through reciprocal relationships in which the family's capabilities are used to meet community demands and community resources are available for the family's needs (McCubbin & Patterson, 1986).

Developmental Theory

Developmental theory was incorporated into the theoretical framework of this study since a study of refugee adolescents must necessarily address the developmental issues of the adolescent. Therefore the following developmental assumptions and postulations guided this study.

Human development is assumed to be influenced by a progressively changing interaction of psychological, biological, and social forces (Crain, 1980; Erickson, 1963; Hill & Rogers, 1964). Certain phenomena reflecting this psychobiosocial interaction in the early stages of growth have high predictive power for understanding personality at later phases (Crain, 1980; Hill & Rogers, 1964).

The family and its individual members must perform

certain time-specific tasks, i.e., physical, social, emotional, cognitive, set by themselves and by the larger society. Some of these tasks are "critical" and should be achieved around a certain time in life (Erickson, 1963; Havighurst, 1953; Hill & Rogers, 1964; Hooper & Hooper, 1985). What these tasks are and when they should be achieved vary from culture to culture (Wagner & Stevenson, 1982). The successful achievement of one person's task is dependent on and contributes to the successful achievement by others in the family of their appropriate tasks (Hill & Mattessich, 1979; Waller & Hill, 1951). Accomplishment/ mastery of developmental tasks satisfies biological requirements, cultural imperatives and personal aspirations (Waller & Hill, 1951). Successful achievement of developmental tasks leads to "happiness and to success with later tasks, while failure leads to unhappiness in the individual, disapproval by the society, and difficulty with later tasks" (Havighurst, 1953, p. 2).

Symbolic Interaction Theory

Symbolic interaction theory was also included within the framework of this study since language, culture, and perceptions play critical roles in this paradigm (Burr, Hill, Nye, & Reiss, 1979; Hill & Hansen, 1960). These are relevant issues in a study of refugee youths since refugees invariably experience clashes between the cultural values and expectations they grew up with and the cultural values

and expectations of the new country in which they are now living (Gilzow, 1989; F. Vocci, personal communication, March, 1989). In addition, for the refugee youth, there is a loss of the cultural givens that provide, in part, the "underpinnings" of the usual adolescent identity development (Nidorf, 1985). Therefore, the following Symbolic Interaction assumptions and postulates guided this study.

We live in a symbolic as well as a physical environment (Burr et al., 1979; McCubbin & Patterson, 1986). We acquire complex sets of symbols in our minds and learn to value the worth or importance of the various symbols. Symbols are important in understanding human behavior. We decide what to do and not do primarily on the basis of symbols.

Socialization occurs into a general culture as well as into various subcultures (Porter & Samovar, 1976). People engage in a process of "definition of the situation" based on the meanings/symbols they bring to the situation (Burr et al., 1979; McCubbin & Patterson, 1986). Any human act involves symbolic interaction.

Every child is part of a particular culture. From the moment of birth the culture into which the child is born shapes his/her experiences and behavior (Benedict, 1959). No one is born free from other people who have relatively fixed ideas of what children should think and value and how they should be raised (Porter & Samovar, 1976). Culture is assumed, making behavior seem normal and

natural and leading people to assume that their particular culture is right or best (Porter & Samovar, 1976). The child's culture serves a very useful social and psychological purpose -- it mediates the world and provides a sense of security, cohesiveness, and identity (Porter & Samovar, 1976). Each family creates its own world and its own local culture (Hess & Handel, 1959).

Methods and Instrumentation

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were utilized in this study. Brewer & Hunter (1989) suggest that multiple methods are more effective than single methods in research. Tripp-Reimer (1983) stated that, in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of a topic, qualitative and quantitative data should be combined because they provide "complementary data sets which together give a more complete picture than can be obtained using any method singly. Each has advantages and limitations; when fused, the positive aspects of both may be seen" (p. 179).

Typically ethnography is eclectic in its use of data collection and analysis procedures (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). Triangulation, the act of bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point, is a concept derived from navigational science that has been effectively applied to social science research (Denzin, 1978). Triangulating with many data sources is a way to corroborate, clarify, elaborate, and illuminate the research data. In addition, triangulation helps to prevent the researcher

from accepting too readily the validity of initial impressions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Rossman & Wilson, 1985).

Observation

Observation was chosen as one of the methods of data collection because it is a valuable way of obtaining information about individual and group behavior and provides the researcher with direct access to phenomena under study. According to Douglas (1976), "Direct experience is the most vital basis of the researcher's further methods of getting at the truth" (p. 108). The strengths of observation in data collection are numerous. It is fairly easy to categorize data for analysis, useful for providing contextual data of the current environment, and easy to administer and manage. Observation is useful for collecting data in natural settings, discovering complex interactions and patterns of behavior, obtaining data on nonverbal behavior and communication, and for facilitating the discovery of nuances in culture. In addition, observation is valuable in facilitating analysis, validity checks, and triangulation.

Life History and the Language Experience Approach

A second method that was chosen was the Language Experience Approach with the Life History data collection technique. As a method, the Language Experience approach provides students with the opportunity to utilize their own experiences and vocabulary as a basis for learning to read

(A. Whiren, personal communication, February, 1989). It was initially designed to be used with teaching children to read in their dominant language (Balajthy, 1989; Durkin, 1983; Franklin, 1988; Genishi, 1988; Sampson, 1988; Searfoss & Readence, 1985). Currently the approach is also being advocated as a tool for teaching second language learning (Dixon & Nessel, 1983; Loughlin & Martin, 1988; A. Whiren, personal communication, March 1989).

The Life History method is useful for defining the growth of a person in a cultural milieu (Marshall & Rossman, 1989) and for examining the perceptions of social and natural relationships, the patterns of beliefs and the conceptualizations of past events (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Pelto & Pelto (1979) note that the "richness and personalized nature of life histories afford a vividness and integration of cultural information that are of great value" (p. 76).

Combining the Life History method with the Language Experience approach was assumed to be a less threatening method for the students in this study than the traditional method of life history interviewing. According to Whyte (1982), there are times when verbal communication will not be adequate in eliciting information. It was assumed that the young people might be intimidated by sitting face-to-face with an interviewer and talking about their life. In addition, drawing would allow the less verbal students the opportunity to share aspects of their life

story in a nonverbal way.

The Life History method combined with the Language Experience Approach has a number of strengths. It facilitates cooperation of the participants, is fairly easy and efficient to administer and manage, and is good for documenting major events, crises, social conflicts, and perceptions. It is also useful in facilitating the discovery of nuances in culture.

Drawings generated by this tool are not analyzed in a projective way, but simply for content as is common in anthropological studies. Klepsch and Logie (1982) advocated the use of drawings with those who have speech and language barriers. They stated that "while the use of multiple measures is always recommended, drawings should not fail to be one of them" (p. 11). Drawings add a dimension not tapped by self-report or observation (Burns, 1987, 1982).

Coles (1967) suggested that "each child's particular life -- his age, his family, his neighborhood, his medical and psychological history, his intelligence -- influences what and how he draws" (p. 45). Furthermore, children's drawings are affected by their "racial background and what that 'fact' means in their particular world (society) at that particular time (period of history)" (p. 45).

Drawings have been found to be useful to those working with Southeast Asians (Burch & Powell, 1980; Downs, Lynch and Paulsen, 1984; Rosenblatt, 1983).

Surveys

Self-administered surveys were the third method of data collection chosen for this study. The survey method has a number of strengths. It is easy to manipulate and categorize data for analysis, easy and efficient to administer and manage, and useful in facilitating analysis, validity checks, and triangulation.

Research Design

The ideal research design for this study would begin with observations at the start the school year and follow through to the end of the school year. Observations of the students would be done in ESL/bilingual classes and main-stream classes. Where possible, participant observation would be desirable, particularly for establishing a cooperative relationship with teachers, bilingual staff, and students as well as for providing additional insights. Observation of behavior would be used to obtain descriptive information and to supplement and confirm data obtained by other methods.

Surveys would then be developed based on observations and supplemented by review of the literature. The surveys and other methods developed for this study would seek to tap themes various researchers and practitioners consider to be essential in understanding refugee youths from Southeast Asia (Ben-Porath, 1987; Biagini, 1989; Carlin, 1986; Irwin & Madden, 1986; Kinzie, 1985; Nidorf, 1985;

Tobin & Friedman, 1984). These themes are as follows: life in homeland with a focus on education, socioeconomic background, health and development, family, trauma, and the problems of war; the escape process; life in the refugee camps such as length of time there, family, and conditions in the camps; adjustment to the U.S. with a focus on losses, expectations and perceptions, adaptation, problems, aspirations and worries, and family.

Concerns regarding content, wording, translatability, and cultural appropriateness are relevant to the utilization of the survey method with refugee students. Therefore, the content, cultural appropriateness, and translatability of the surveys would be critiqued and, where necessary, revised by a committee of bilingual professionals. Following this, the surveys would be translated into the first language of the students by a committee of bilingual professionals. Since some of the young people may read better in English than in their first language, the ideal would be to have one version of each survey with the translation directly above or below the English questions for the purpose of equivalency.

Bilingual research assistants may be necessary in a study with refugee/immigrant students. Thus, the ideal design would include adequate instruction and training of these assistants in the purpose of the study, instruction in their role and the necessity of confidentiality, instruction and practice in the administration of the

surveys with the opportunity for feedback regarding necessary revisions, and a general overview of the methodological and theoretical framework of the study. Where possible, potential bilingual assistants would be screened according to qualities that would enhance or hinder a study with adolescent refugees, particularly by screening for bias and prejudice toward certain subgroups among their own people. Additional training in interview techniques may be necessary if some of the participating students are not able to read well enough in English or in their first language to complete the surveys on their own. Therefore, those students would be interviewed. The interview would consist of reading the survey questions and writing down the answers given by the students. These interviews would be done individually and in a room that ensures complete privacy.

Surveys would be administered with a time gap of at least one week between each survey. Surveys written in first language would be translated into English by the bilingual assistants.

Students would be given a two month period or more to work on life histories. These could be done as class assignments with all the students or with a select group in the study. Ideally these assignments would be written in English to avoid the time consuming task of translation.

After gathering the data from observation, surveys, and life histories, the researcher would organize,

triangulate, and analyze the data.

Background of the Researcher

In any research study, it is important to know a little of the background of a researcher since bias cannot help but infiltrate various aspects of the study. This researcher approached this study from a cross-cultural background. Her experiences have been among ethnic cultures in Central America, such as Indians, other Central Americans, Arabs, Israelis, and Chinese. She had a similar experience as the students she was studying -- that of entering a school in another country and attempting to adapt socially and perform academically with the handicap of not understanding the language or culture. In addition, because she was sent to the United States for high school while her family remained in Central America, she is aware of what it is like to be an adolescent who must adjust culturally and socially without the support of family.

Though she has not been to Vietnam and does not know the language, she did not enter this study blindly. She has attended seminars addressing the issues of Vietnamese students at the annual Bilingual/Migrant Education conference, was a participant-visitor in an ESL/bilingual class as part of an independent study, and has friends and acquaintances who are Vietnamese.

Implementation

This study was conducted in West Michigan. One ESL/bilingual program was chosen because of the proximity of its sites to the researcher. Three high schools which were magnet centers of the program became sites of the study because the students in these schools were adolescents (Chapter 4). A fourth magnet center was excluded because it was an elementary school, and the students were younger than 12 years old. Where the data required that distinctions be made between the three sites, they are referred to as school #1, school #2, and school #3.

After obtaining UCRIHS permission (Michigan State University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects), written permission was obtained from the director of the ESL/bilingual program and the principals of the high schools. Next a meeting was held with the Vietnamese bilingual staff to explain the nature and purpose of the study and to ask for volunteer help with the project. As noted above, the researcher has not been to Vietnam and does not speak Vietnamese. Therefore, Vietnamese bilingual staff played a critical role in this study as translators and interviewers. In addition, they were valuable "culture brokers" (Chambers, 1985) to the researcher throughout this study.

There were five Vietnamese bilingual volunteers, four women and one man. They all were full-time paraprofessionals or substitute paraprofessionals in the local

ESL/Bilingual program. They all participated in the translation work. Three, two women and one man, also participated as interviewers.

The parents/guardians of all the adolescent Vietnamese students (ages 12-20) in this program were contacted by a letter written in their dominant language and informing them of the study. The letter was accompanied by an informed consent form (Appendix A). Those students whose parents/guardians permitted their participation in the study were informed of the nature and purpose of the study. It was made clear to the students that they had the right to decline participation. Those who were willing to participate had the option of verbal or written informed consent. The oral informed consent contained the same wording as the written consent form.

At the beginning of this study there was a potential total of 42 adolescent Vietnamese students as participants. Two of these students were not permitted by the parents to participate. Two other students who were permitted did not want to participate. Thus, a total of 38 students were permitted/willing to be part of the study. However, two more left school prior to the administration of the surveys, dropping the total to 36 participants. Twenty-six were male and 10 were female (Table 2).

Due to time constraints, this study did not meet the ideal framework of one full school year but, instead, covered the months of December through April. Because of

Table 2: Participants

Ethnicity	Male	Female	Total
Ethnic Vietnamese	18	4	22
Amerasian	5	5	10
Sino-Vietnamese	3		3
Ethnic Chinese		1	1
	<hr/> 26	<hr/> 10	<hr/> 36

the limited time, observation did not precede and thus did not contribute to survey development. Therefore, the two self-administered surveys (Appendix B) which were utilized in this study were based on the literature mentioned above and included those factors and variables.

While the ideal may be to have a more open-ended ethnographic interview, the language and time limitations of the researcher made this impossible. The use of translators and interviewers was a must. The need to control the amount of data to be translated and the need to control for interviewer effects required the more structured approach.

Since a panel of experts in the field of refugee research with adolescents from Vietnam was not available to the researcher, a group of experts on the culture of

Vietnam and the refugee experience were used -- the Vietnamese bilingual paraprofessionals. The English version of the surveys was administered to and critiqued by the bilingual paraprofessionals. Following this, translations of the surveys were made into Vietnamese using back translation and a committee of bilinguals which consisted of three bilingual paraprofessionals and two former paraprofessionals from the same program.

One training meeting was conducted with the three full-time Vietnamese paraprofessionals. The content of the meeting was as follows: 1) instruction in interview techniques and administration of surveys, 2) instruction in maintaining confidentiality, 3) practice in administering the surveys with one another, 4) feedback regarding need for further revisions, 5) provision of a framework for the participating staff by the researcher, i.e., a contextualized theory of development with these particular students in mind and based on refugee research, child development, and the Ecological Model. The inclusion of instruction in interview techniques was necessary since some of the students in the study were unable to read well enough in either language to complete the surveys on their own.

The researcher observed the students in their classrooms to describe the behavior of Vietnamese adolescents in U.S. schools. Observations were done in the ESL and mainstream classes as well as at school parties for Christmas and the Vietnamese New Year. In the ESL and

mainstream classes the researcher was introduced as a student who was visiting classes in the high school. At school #3 the researcher was a participant observer in the role of tutor for the Vietnamese students and, occasionally, as translator for the Spanish speaking students.

Observational data were recorded in narrative form using general guidelines. First was sketching out the floor plan of the class(es), then recording who was present, then noting general characteristics and verbal and nonverbal behavior and communications.

The surveys were administered with a time gap of two weeks between each survey. Two students at school #1, two students at school #2, and three students at school #3 were interviewed by the paraprofessionals because they were unable to read well enough, as determined by the ESL teachers, to complete the survey on their own. Surveys that were completed in Vietnamese were translated into English by one of the paraprofessionals.

The life history instructions were given to the ESL teachers by the researcher (Appendix C). These assignments were administered by the teachers and were done by all the students during class. The teachers then gave the participating students the option of whether or not to have their work included in the study. Those assignments which were permitted to be in the study were then given to the researcher by the teachers. Thirty students contributed at least one writing and/or drawing assignment. Twenty-four

contributed at least two assignments, 17 contributed three, and 16 contributed four.

While the ideal was to have all the students write in English, this was impossible at school #3. Therefore, the design was modified to allow them to write in Vietnamese. With the exception of one student, all the students at school #3 wrote in Vietnamese. The bilingual paraprofessional at that school translated their writings into English.

After gathering the materials from the surveys and life histories, the researcher organized and analyzed the data. Triangulation of data was a major factor in the analysis stage.

Findings and Analysis

The findings were organized into chapters which follow the historical periods of the students' lives, from their growing up years in Vietnam, through escape, refugee camps, and arrival and adjustment in the United States. A distinct chapter was devoted to the Amerasian students because they provide some contrast insights on Vietnamese refugee students.

All data on the surveys and life histories are based on the students' perceptions of their experiences and current situations. Quotations included in the findings are taken from the students writings as well as from the researcher's field notes. Unless otherwise indicated, quotes by the students are as they wrote them in English.

Quotes that are translated from Vietnamese are indicated by an asterisk (*).

The criteria for selection of writings to include in the findings involved trying to get at least one male and one female and/or one student from each school. There were no repeats from a single student in a category. An additional criteria, where possible, involved trying to include writings which had accompanying drawings. Drawings which were included with or without accompanying writings were chosen on the basis of illustrative purposes, expressiveness, and whether or not they were clear enough to be reproduced.

Since one of the main purposes of this study was to explore the problem area, it was necessary to leave open many aspects of the research process. The analysis was an ongoing process as well as a final stage in this study. Analysis included categorization. Properties of a category were discovered by listing how all units were alike and how they differed from units outside the category. Core properties were then used to develop definitions of the categories. Sorting data into categories was followed by establishing the frequency with which phenomena occurred.

Analysis also involved the establishment of linkages. This was done by comparing and contrasting, by inference, and by identifying underlying associations. According to Goetz and LeCompte (1984), "Guidance for establishing linkages, for the ethnographer, comes from

asking questions of participants as well as checking alternative groupings and ordering of specific events in triangulation" (p. 172).

A final component of the analysis was speculation. This involved asserting that relationships among constructs occurred often enough to be more than chance happenings. The variety of experiences and characteristics within this particular group of students provided variance. Without this variance the conclusions would not necessarily be the same.

Much of the data from the surveys was organized into sets of frequency distributions. Findings from the surveys, direct observation, and life histories were synthesized and compared to see the extent to which they provide new insights for helping Vietnamese adolescent refugees adapt/adjust to school and life in the United States.

Limitations of the Study

Concerns regarding validity and reliability are difficult issues to resolve in an ethnographic study. However, if a study is to be considered legitimate, it must seek to have as much control as possible over threats to validity and reliability. On the other hand, one cannot judge, or expect to judge, the reliability and validity of an ethnographic design as one would judge an experimental design (Douglas, 1976; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Tripp-Reimer, 1985).

Internal Validity

Internal validity, or credibility, an alternative concept proposed by Lincoln & Guba (1985), may be the strength of an exploratory/descriptive study. As Marshall & Rossman (1989) note, "the complexities of variables and interactions will be so embedded with data derived from the setting that it cannot help but be valid within the parameters of that setting, population and theoretical framework" (p.145).

The following are threats to the internal validity of this study. The first is observer effects. Observation may have affected the behavior of the students. This threat was reduced by checking with the teacher as to whether this was typical behavior of the students and the extent to which the researcher's presence may have had some effect. The researcher also sought to reduce this threat by remaining as unobtrusive as possible, such as sitting in the back of the room out of the eyesight of most students.

The researcher's own personal-cultural frame of reference most likely produced observer effects through her perceptions of what was occurring. This threat was minimally controlled by recording only WHAT was happening and leaving out interpretations. Where interpretations were necessary, they were recorded in a separate notebook. In addition, this threat was reduced by using the bilingual volunteers as "culture brokers" and checking their perceptions of the behavior and interactions.

Some of the students who were interviewed, due to inability to read the questionnaires in English or in Vietnamese, may have reacted to interviewer effects. There was little way to control for this.

A second threat to internal validity is the selection of the participants. There may have been differences between those who chose/were allowed to participate in the study and those who refused/were not been allowed to participate. This threat to internal validity was partially accounted for by observing differences in their behavior in the classroom(s).

Mortality is a third threat to internal validity. This could not be controlled since students were given the choice of dropping out of the study at any point. In addition, student turnover rate was particularly high in school #3. While mortality could not be controlled, it was carefully accounted for in this study.

A fourth threat is spurious conclusions. This threat was reduced by the use of alternative and corroborating sources of data. While this study was not able to identify the precise causes of phenomena, as no research design can, the design did aid in specifying "an array of the most plausible causes and designating among them the most probable" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 223).

External Validity

External validity, or transferability, an alternative concept proposed by Lincoln & Guba (1985), is problematic

in this study if one attempts to apply it to other populations and settings. However, this lack of generalizability does not lessen the usefulness of the study for the context in which it was made. According to Marshall and Rossman (1989), a study that ties the research to a body of theory and triangulates multiple sources of data can be generalized and transferable to those who make policy or design research studies within those same parameters.

Internal Reliability

Internal reliability, or confirmability, an alternative concept proposed by Lincoln & Guba (1985), addresses the concerns that the natural subjectivity of the researcher will shape the research. One of the primary safeguards against unreliability was the utilization of concepts from a theoretical framework that informed the study. This provided "an anchor for consistency from which legitimate, well-explicated departures can be made" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 220).

Another check for reliability in this study was the use of bilingual research assistants to check whether what the researcher was seeing and recording and understanding were similar to what the bilingual teachers and students were seeing/meaning. Confirmation was sought for various levels of the data collection and analysis process such as descriptions of events and interactions, interpretation of meanings and explanation of overall processes.

An additional check for researcher bias was to

indicate the theoretical assumptions underlying the study and the background of the researcher.

External Reliability

External reliability, or dependability, an alternative concept proposed by Lincoln & Guba (1985), addresses the issue of whether an independent researcher would discover the same phenomena in the same or similar settings. Approaching external reliability is more difficult for ethnographers than for practitioners of other research models due to the nature of an ethnographic study (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). It requires attempting to account for changing conditions in the phenomena as well as changes in design which result from increasingly refined understanding (Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

The researcher sought to enhance the external reliability by recognizing and handling the following major problems. The first was researcher status position. Goetz & LeCompte (1984) note that "In some ways no ethnographer can replicate the findings of another because the flow of information is dependent on the social role held within the group" (p. 214). This was complex for this study since it involved not only the status of the researcher but of the bilingual volunteers as well. The researcher handled this problem by making sure that the research report clearly identified the roles and statuses. A second threat to external reliability is informant choices. Since each

individual informant has access to unique and idiosyncratic information, this threat to reliability was handled by careful description of those who provided the data. Social situations and conditions pose another problem to external reliability. This threat was handled by describing the social, interpersonal, and physical contexts within which data were gathered. A fourth threat was analytic constructs and premises. This threat to external reliability was reduced by explicitly stating the theories and assumptions guiding the study. A fifth problem involved methods of data collection and analysis. Since replicability is impossible without precise identification and thorough description of strategies used to collect data, the researcher sought to be as precise as possible throughout the research process. This involved describing how data were acquired and how materials from various sources were integrated.

Summary

This is an ethnographic study of 36 adolescent Vietnamese students in a West Michigan ESL/bilingual program. The study was designed within a tripartite theoretical framework: the ecological systems model, developmental theory, and symbolic interaction theory. Multiple methods of data collection were utilized, particularly participant observation, life histories, and surveys. These were triangulated in the findings.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS I: THE SCHOOLS

This chapter provides a brief, contextual overview of the participating ESL/Bilingual program and the schools which served as sites for the study. Much of the information comes from observation and conversations with the ESL/bilingual teachers.

Historical Context

For the first 150 years of our nation, bilingual education was a given (Lyons, 1990). Until World War I, all the school districts in such cities as Cincinnati, Milwaukee, and Detroit taught in German and English and utilized immigrant teachers. Following World War I, however, language became equated with loyalty and patriotism. Germans were the largest minority group. Twenty states passed laws that made it a criminal offense to preach or teach in German. By 1920 there was no more bilingual education. There was also a decline in the teaching of foreign languages in schools. During World War II foreign languages gained in importance as the U.S. department of defense recruited German and Italian speakers to intercept messages, Japanese speakers as interpreters, and Mohawk and Navaho Indians as code talkers to pass messages. These were the only codes never to be broken.

In 1968 Congress, prompted by the Civil rights act and

by a study that showed a high dropout rate of minority youth from school, passed the 1968 Bilingual Education Act (Padilla, 1983). The Bilingual Act, however, "did not require anything of local school districts; it merely gave them money to do something about their failure to educate minority language students" (Padilla, 1983, p. x).

Because of the lack of specific guidelines, several different theories and methods of teaching emerged. Currently, there are three major methods being used:

1. Maintenance Program: All subjects are taught in native tongue except one period daily of English (Johnson, 1985).
2. Transitional Program: Provides intensive instruction in English supported by instruction in native language in order to integrate the students into mainstream classes (Johnson, 1985).
3. English as a Second Language (ESL) Program: Intense study of English skills, stressing mastery of grammar and phonology so that the students can acquire the skills to help them communicate with their teachers in the monolingual classroom (Henderson, 1972).

Because of the lack of specific guidelines and the bait of competitive grants, school districts have often had to drop one type of program for another in order to meet the current administration's requirements (Lyons, 1990). In addition, political and educational debates seem to have divided the ranks of bilingual educators, administrators,

and policy makers. Furthermore, the need to compete for limited resources/funding, has not been conducive to promoting cooperation between the various ESL/Bilingual programs. As a result, though Bilingual Education has been in existence for almost two decades, little seems to have been accomplished in the area of well-defined programs.

The Local ESL/Bilingual Program

Prior to 1986, bilingual students within the local five-district consortium were either enrolled in the nearby metropolitan Bilingual program or were sent to the Adult ESL program at the local Community Education facility. The problems with these options were:

1. To attend the metropolitan program, students were bussed out of their district which involved the cost of tuition and transportation to the district.
2. Those attending ESL classes were placed with adult learners, with adult curriculum, to acquire functional English language skills before beginning academic studies.

Because of the needs of these students and their increasing number in the area, a local ESL/Bilingual program for K-12 bilingual students was implemented to serve the five districts. The program is funded by a categorical grant, which is an automatic grant for any program meeting the criteria.

Each year the amount of money for categorical grants is spread widely throughout the state of Michigan. The money is divided between all the programs which

meet the criteria. The amount varies from year to year depending on how much money is available. It ranges from \$200 to \$300 per head. On the fourth Friday of the month of September the ESL/bilingual student count is taken in each school and sent to the State Department of Education. Our program also receives pro-rated state aid and categorical funding for wards of the court. Many ESL/bilingual programs supplement the categorical grants with competitive grants, but these grants are so competitive that small programs such as ours that are under 100 students aren't even considered. The competitive grants tend to be given only to large metropolitan programs or to language groups never funded. Because we don't have adequate funding we don't have enough books and materials (ESL teacher).

The ESL/Bilingual program in this study is a transitional program, which is required in the state of Michigan. At the request of the district superintendents, the program was designed to be a half-day program in order to keep the students in their home school mainstream class(es) for part of the day.

The half-day program involves a block of three hours and includes the following:

1st Hour: ESL English

2nd Hour: Content Area Tutoring which involves
bilingual tutoring and integration of
language skills with mainstream class
assignments

3rd Hour: ESL-World Geography and alternate years
U.S. History. Regular Social Studies
credit granted.

Students may take the maximum of three hours or may be assigned one or two of the hours depending on their area of

need. The aim is for students to pass through the program in a maximum of three years. If students are not ready to be fully mainstreamed after three years, they may choose to have one hour of content area tutoring in place of a study hall. Readiness for full mainstream is based on a combination of English Language Proficiency levels and Academic/Literacy levels.

This program uses six English Language Proficiency levels in assessing students. At the monolingual level the student does not understand, speak or write English, but may know a few isolated words/expressions. At the beginner level students understand simple sentences, especially if spoken slowly and they speak only isolated words and short phrases. At the low intermediate level, students, with effort and help, can carry on a conversation in English and understand at least parts of lessons, and follow simple directions. The high intermediate is the stage at which the student speaks and understands English without too much difficulty and has an adequate but limited vocabulary. Quite often students at this level display low achievement which is indicative of language interference. At the advanced level the student speaks and understands both English and the home language without difficulty, and displays normal academic achievement for grade level. However, the student spends much more time preparing for assignments than his English-speaking peers and has difficulty processing new or technical information without the help of a tutor. At the proficiency level the student has no difficulty with English and maintains grade level with the same effort as his English-speaking peers.

There are five academic/literacy levels. At level one the student is illiterate in own language and English. At level two the student is five or more years below grade level. At level three the student is three to four years below grade level. At level four the student is one to two years below grade level. At level five the student is at grade level (ESL teacher).

Schools #1 and #2, two of the sites for this study, are the magnet centers of the half-day program for high

schoolers and middle schoolers. A third magnet center for the half day program is in an elementary school for the younger group of students and therefore was not included in this study. The fourth magnet center, School #3, is a full-day program and served as the third site for this study.

School #1

Located on a large campus in a suburban neighborhood, school #1 is dominated by professional, upper middle class families. However, large apartment complexes have recently been built nearby and thus the school is serving more lower income groups. School #1 is considered one of the best in the area.

The school building is a large one story building which spreads into multiple wings. The rooms, like the campus, are large, attractive, and well-equipped.

From 11:30 to 2:30 a large science room becomes an ESL classroom. Students are divided into three main groups according to English Language Proficiency Levels. The beginner to low intermediate level group sits in a semi-circle, closely facing a blackboard at one side of the room. In the back of the room are three round tables. At one of these tables a bilingual teacher works with the monolingual group. And in the front of the room the high intermediate level students work with an ESL teacher and a bilingual tutor.

The Students

The students in the ESL/classes at school #1 are mostly drawn from its own building with some of the students coming from two nearby middle schools.

There are 32 students enrolled in these classes. Twenty-one are male and 11 are female. Thirty percent of the students are early adolescent, ages 12-14, 65% are middle adolescent, ages 15-17, and 15% are late adolescent, ages 18-19. Five percent of the students are in their first year of the program, 55% are in their second year, and 30% are in their third year.

With the exception of two female Arab students, the students in these classes are Asian (Table 3). The dominant group is Vietnamese, particularly Vietnamese males.

The Teachers

One ESL teacher and three paraprofessionals work with the students. The ESL teacher is an Anglo-American in her mid 30s. She has been involved in ESL programs for 15 years, starting out as an aid when she was in high school. She has been with this program since its beginning four years ago. The ESL paraprofessional is an Anglo-American and in her 40s. She has been working with this program for three years.

One of the bilingual paraprofessionals is Vietnamese and in her 40s. She escaped Vietnam in 1978 because she was in danger of being sent to a concentration camp for having worked with a foreign embassy prior to 1975. She

Table 3: Student Population at School #1

Race	Ethnicity	Male	Female	Total
Asian	Vietnamese	15	4	19
	Chinese	3	1	4
	Korean	2	2	4
	Cambodian	2	1	3
Middle Eastern	Arabic		2	2
		21	10	31

has been in the U.S. for 11 years and has her degree in Chemistry.

The other bilingual paraprofessional is also Vietnamese and in her 40s. She left Vietnam in 1986 because her husband was imprisoned by the communists and because she wanted to reunite with her sons who had escaped to the U.S. She was a secretary and elementary teacher in Vietnam and has been in the U.S. two years.

School #2

Located in a crowded, business/residential area off a busy main street, school #2 serves mostly factory working/blue collar families. Since space is at a minimum in the area, the school is built on a small plot of land and is a

three-story building.

While the external environment is crowded, the inside of the building is very comfortable and roomy, with carpeted halls. The inside of the building is rectangular, with an attractive library and cafeteria in the center on the first floor.

From 8:10 to 11:10 a large resource room in the center of the second floor becomes the ESL/Bilingual classroom. It is a rectangular room divided into three main sections lengthwise by dividers. One of these sections is further divided into two areas for individual study. Two doors located in the back of the room open into two small conference rooms.

As in school #1, the students in school #2 are divided into three main groups. The monolingual group meets in a section at the end of the room, the beginner to low intermediate group meets in one of the conference rooms, and the high intermediate level students meet in the larger middle section of the room.

The Students

The students in these classes are drawn from five other schools besides school #2. Two of the schools are middle schools located in the same business area and serve the same population as school #2. Two other schools are located in rural areas, one serving a conservative agricultural community and the other serving a mixture of upper middle class and farmers. The fifth school is in a

poor district in the city.

Fifty percent of the students are in their first year in the program, 30% are in their 2nd year, and 20% are in their third year. Twenty-three students are enrolled in these classes. Eighty-three percent are male and 17 percent are female. Eighteen percent of the students are early adolescents, 78% are middle adolescents, and 4% are late adolescents.

There is a wide variety of racial and ethnic groups in this population (Table 4). As in school #1, the dominant group is Vietnamese males.

The Teachers

The same four teachers who work in school #1 work with the students in school #2.

School #3

In 1989, the ESL/Bilingual program was expanded to include an alternative to the half-day program. Thus school #3 became a fourth magnet center. It provides alternative schooling for refugee/immigrant youth who are between 15 and 21 years old and who are three or more years below grade level. It is also for high risk refugee/immigrant youth who are in danger of dropping out of school, and for the refugee/immigrant youth who are academically motivated but not succeeding in the traditional school setting and who could benefit from a more individualized program.

Table 4: Student Population at School #2

Race	Ethnic Group	Male	Female	Total
Asian	Vietnamese	11	3	14
	Korean	1		1
	Filipino	1		1
European	Hungarian	2		2
	Rumanian	1		1
	German	1		1
Latin	Puerto Rican	2	1	3
Middle Eastern	Pakistani	1		1
		<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
		20	4	24

The program works in cooperation with other high school completion programs in the building to mainstream the students -- one student this year is taking two mainstream classes: typing and business machines -- and with an area skills center. After one year of intensive ESL and basic skills instruction, the students will be provided the opportunity to take classes part of the day at the skills center and to work toward specific job skills training while continuing their education with the short range goal

of earning a high school diploma. The goal of this program is to provide the students with the opportunity to follow dual paths of school and work.

Located in a one-story community education facility off a busy main street, school #3 serves a mixture of people, most of whom are poverty level or on welfare. Besides housing the alternative program for refugee/immigrant youth, school #3 also houses a high school completion program, an alternative high school program for pregnant teens/teen mothers, an ESL program for adults, and an Adult Basic Education program. The building's cafeteria also serves the students from the second building: a group of adults who are certified Mentally Impaired, a group of handicapped students, a group of welfare clients who are mandated by social services to take classes as a stipulation for receiving welfare checks, and students in a High School Completion program.

One half of the building is sectioned off for the alternative education high school for pregnant teens/teen mothers who appear to be the dominant population in the building. At lunchtime the hallways erupt with noisy activity as toddlers, teens and adults of different color and nationalities gravitate toward the cafeteria.

To the right of the entrance of the building is the classroom for the refugee/immigrant youths. It is a small room with three rectangular tables that seem to take up the whole room. There is a study carrel with headphones and

tape recorder and a computer with programs for math. On a side wall is a map of the world and two student crayon drawings of the flag of Vietnam and the flag of Honduras.

The schedule is as follows:

8:30 - 9:00	Independent study
9:00 - 10:00	ESL: Personal living/Vocational Skills
10:00 - 10:15	Break
10:15 - 11:30	ESL: Reading and spelling
11:30 - 12:00	Lunch
12:00 - 1:00	Social studies and science
1:00 - 1:15	Break
1:15 - 2:30	Math and writing

The Students

All the students are in their first year in this ESL/Bilingual program. Two, a male and a female, have been in the U.S. for a few years. The rest have been in the U.S. eight months or less.

The composition of this group has changed so many times that it is difficult to give a single description. Therefore, Table 5 portrays the changing composition of the class. For most of the time the group consisted of all Vietnamese, with the dominant group being Amerasian. In the 6th month of the school year, two Honduran males joined the class.

Sixty percent of the students are middle adolescents and 40% are late adolescent. There are no early adolescents in this group.

Table 5: Student Population at School #3

Month	Ethnic Group	Male	Female	Total
September	Ethnic Vietnamese	1	1	2
	Amerasian	4	1	5
	Laotian	3		3
		<u>8</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>10</u>
November	Ethnic Vietnamese	1	1	2
	Amerasian	3	1	4
		<u>4</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>6</u>
February	Ethnic Vietnamese	1	1	2
	Amerasian	2	3	5
	Honduran	2		2
		<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>9</u>
April	Ethnic Vietnamese	1	2	3
	Amerasian	4	5	9
	Honduran	2		2
		<u>7</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>14</u>

The Teachers

The teacher of the students at school #3 is an Anglo-American in her 50s. She has her degree in Special Education and has taught ESL for five years and Job Club for ten years.

The bilingual paraprofessional is a Vietnamese male in his mid 20s. He came to the U.S. nine years ago as an unaccompanied minor at age 16. He graduated from a high school and Bible college in the U.S. This is his first year teaching in a bilingual program.

Summary

The participating ESL/Bilingual Program is basically a transitional half-day program. Three of the four magnet centers are high schools and served as the sites for this study. School #1 has the largest group of ESL students and is located in an area which serves mostly upper middle class and professional families. School #2 has the second largest number of students, is located in an area serving mostly blue collar families, and is the most racially mixed. School #3 is an alternative program for adolescents who are three or more years below grade level. The school is located in a building which serves mostly poverty level/welfare populations.

Chapter 5

FINDINGS II: GROWING UP IN VIETNAM

I was born on the Earth in South Vietnam. I lived there about fifteen years before I came to the United States (17 year old male).

This chapter is the beginning of a journey, a journey in the footsteps of a group of adolescent Vietnamese. Through their own words and drawings they share the personal side of each step of the journey, starting with their life in Vietnam, through escape, refugee camps, and arrival and adjustment in the United States.

The young people in this study spent their formative years in Vietnam. Therefore, it is important to understand some of their background experiences and environments in order to gain some understanding of their current struggles and strengths. The students themselves revealed a common need for such understanding. When asked what they wished their teachers understood about them, the majority theme was, "I wish my teachers understood more about my homeland and culture and the experiences I've been through."

This chapter will explore some of the various environments surrounding and impacting the youths in their growing up years in Vietnam, environments such as community, home and family, war and postwar situations, and education.

Community Environment

The students in this study come from areas in North, Central, and Southern Vietnam. Most are from the South. Figure 1 is a map indicating the cities or regions that were home for these young people.

Climate

Vietnam is a long, thin country. The Vietnamese sometimes think of their country as a pole with a basket of rice on each end (Hickey, 1964; Wright, 1989). Located above the equator, it has a tropical climate. Differences in temperature vary, however, depending on the region. In the winter Northern Vietnam is cool and wet.

Vietnam is a beautiful country. It gets cold in the winter (15 year old male from Dinh Quoi).

Southern Vietnam is sometimes wet and always hot. Some cooler temperatures in the South are found in the hill areas.

I liked living in Vietnam because it's very beautiful. The climate is very hot and usually sunny. In Vietnam you have a duck and a rooster. In Vietnam you have many flowers (15 year old male).

In Vietnam the climate is hot and sunny. In the beginning of summer there is much rain. Vegetation in my country is very fresh and the flowers are very beautiful. There are many fruits to eat. They are delicious (13 year old male).

Vietnam is by the sea. It has lovely landscapes and a very nice mist in the woods (17 year old male).

My country is beautiful in terms of landscapes, but it is not good in political as well as economics (16 year old female).

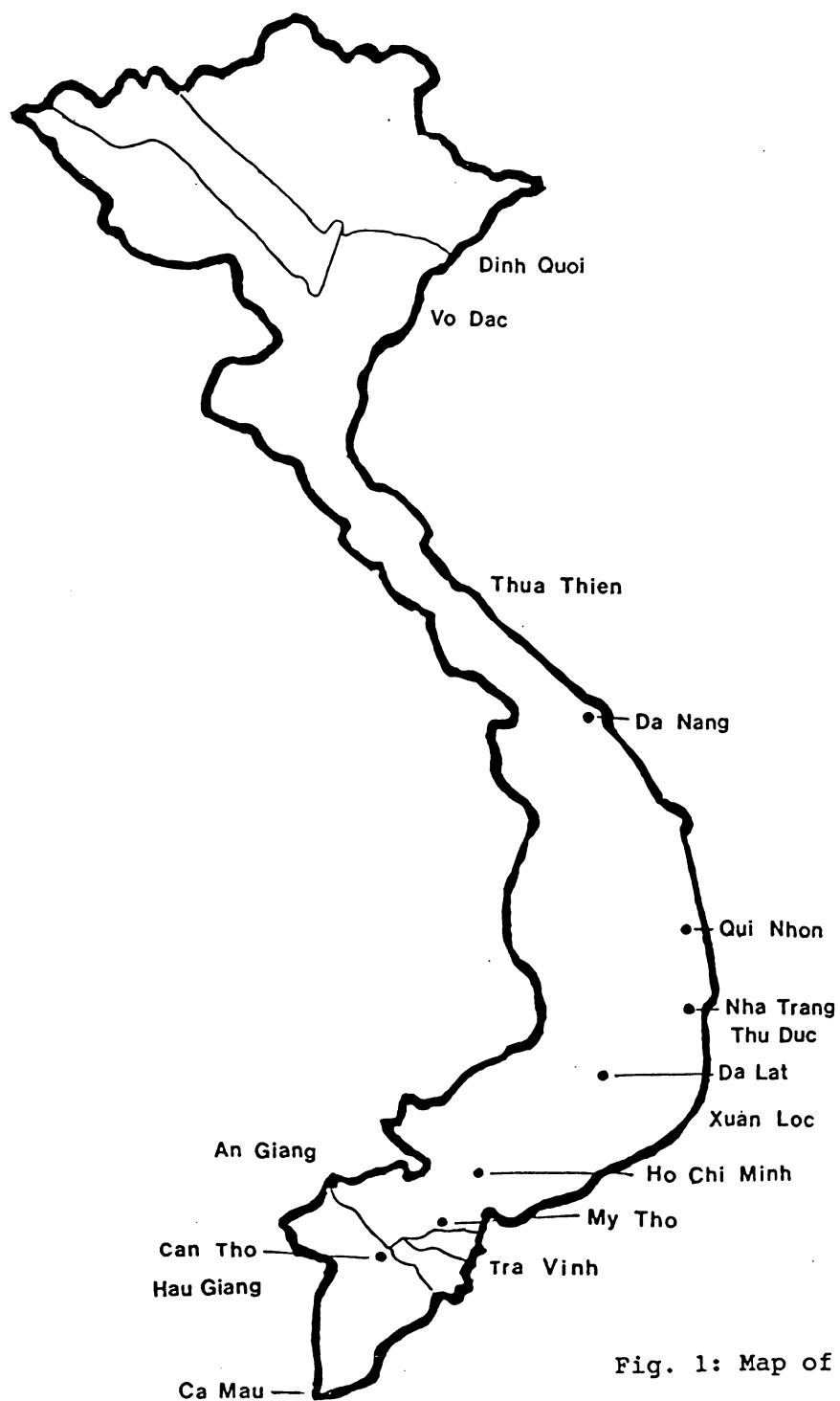


Fig. 1: Map of Vietnam

City Environment

Around 33% of the students spent at least one year living in a city. The majority of these moved to a city, mostly Saigon, around the end of the Vietnam war and then moved back to their village after the war.

I was born in small town of Tra Vinh, South Vietnam. When I was 2 years old my family move to Saigon. It was capital of South Vietnam. Our family live there until after 1975, then my family move back to our town again (18 year old male).

I was born in Thu Duc. In 1974 my family move to Saigon. After war, we moved back to Thu Duc (16 year old male).

Saigon/Ho Chi Minh City. Around 27% of the students in this study spent at least one year in Saigon, now called Ho Chi Minh City. Fourteen percent were born and raised there.

I was born in Saigon, the old capital of South VN before 1975. After 1975, Saigon still was the biggest city in VN. It a nosy, busy city. I will never forget my childhood. I lived in a medium sized home but enough material things and it was very comfortable (15 year old male).

I was born in Nha Trang Vietnam. When the communists put my father in jail, my mother took me and my brothers to Saigon (16 year old female).

Ho Chi Minh City is the largest city in Vietnam with around 3,500,000 residents (Wright, 1989). This city is on the southern tip of Vietnam, just eight degrees north of the equator. Thus, the city has a steamy average annual temperature of 81 degrees Fahrenheit.

The most common forms of transportation are bikes and

pedicabs and motor scooters. On the streets of the city, men and boys with patches, glue, and air pumps, busy themselves fixing flat tires on the thousands of bicycles (Wright, 1989). Less than one percent of all Vietnamese own an automobile. Most taxi cars that once filled the streets of Saigon have not moved since 1975.

My Tho. One student in this study was from the city of My Tho. This is the largest of the delta cities on the Mekong River (Wright, 1989). Fishing is a major activity in this city. During the Vietnam war, My Tho became known world wide when a Vietnamese pilot accidentally dropped a napalm bomb on a Buddhist temple where civilians were hiding. A photojournalist caught a picture of a burned, naked little girl running down the road screaming. This unforgettable picture in the newspapers made the war real to readers everywhere.

Da Lat. Another student in this study lived in the city of Da Lat.

I was born in a small hospital in Dalat, South Vietnam. My family still lives there (15 year old male).

Da Lat is a city on the southern edge of the highlands, 4,920 feet above sea level. It has an average annual temperature of 70 degrees Fahrenheit (Wright, 1989). It is an important city for growing exports such as flowers, ornamental pines and fruits.

Da Nang. The city of Da Nang was the home of another student in this study. Da Nang is a large, busy city. During the Vietnam war it was the site of a huge U.S. air base (Wright, 1989). Today it is one of the major areas in Vietnam where scrap metal from the war is stockpiled for sale to the Japanese.

Nha Trang. Nha Trang was home for another student in this study. Nha Trang is the southern most city of the central region. It is a resort town with beautiful beaches (Wright, 1989). A nearby bay, Cam Ranh Bay, is the site of the only Soviet naval base in the southwest Pacific. During the Vietnam war, Cam Ranh Bay was where the U.S. navy unloaded troops and cargo during the Vietnam war.

Village Community Environment

Sixty percent of the students in school #1, 69 percent in school #2, and 88% of the students in school #3 grew up in rural areas in the north, central, and southern areas. Some of these areas are noted in Figure 1.

The economy of Vietnam is agricultural and the heart of the country is the village. Vietnamese tradition says that the government can do what it wants, but that its authority ends at the village gate (Timberlake & Cook, 1984).

Villages range from a dozen to several hundred families (Dillard, 1987). In the village community, support systems supplement the services of family and religious institutions. For example, each village usually contains a

network of health and mental health care providers: folk doctors, midwives, spirit men, religious healers, fortune tellers, matchmakers, and marketplace venders (Timberlake & Cook, 1984).

Health care was touched on by several students in this study.

I was born in the village and my family grew up in this place. There wasn't a doctor nearby, just a nurse. If we got sick we could buy medicines, but it wasn't easy to buy medicines because good medicines had to be imported from other countries (17 year old male).

I was a tradeboy for buying and selling medicines. I made a lot of money for helping my family (compare Vietnam's currency) (16 year old male).

This type of rural/folk health care occurs not only in the village community but also in the city. Cities such as Saigon may stand in marked contrast to the village communities, but many village traditions are maintained in the city neighborhoods (Timberlake & Cook, 1984).

My mom traded medicines so we could cure ourselves. We didn't see doctor because of high pay. Besides there were just a few doctors in the city. There were some pharmacists in Saigon so we could buy medicines there. Everyone like to buy medicines in the "black market" because of the lower prices (17 year old male).

Each village also served as a source of folklore, myths, and songs, which were passed along from one generation to the next and served as rich sources of knowledge, insights, and ancient coping skills (Timberlake & Cook, 1984).

Ethnic Environment

The students in this study come from several different ethnic backgrounds (Table 2). Many ethnic groups live in Vietnam. About 85 percent of the total population are ethnic Vietnamese (Wright, 1989). They are descendants of Thais, Chinese, and Indonesians who mixed to create the distinctive features of the Vietnamese people. The ethnic Vietnamese tend to see themselves as three distinct groups: Northern, Southern, and Central.

The Republic of Vietnam is represented by its flag (the old flag not the new one of the communists) of yellow foundation with three red stripes. The three stripes stand for people from three parts, Northern, Central and Southern Vietnam, but become one nation under the common spirit of people bearing the same blood (red) and the same color of skin (yellow). While Vietnamese is spoken throughout Vietnam, it varies slightly from one region to another. There are three main dialects: the Northern dialect with six tones, the Southern dialect with five tones and the dialect in the Central area with 4 tones. People from the different areas also have some different characteristics. The people in the North tend to be aggressive, the people in the Central area tend to be controlling (they are descendants of the royalty), and the people in the South tend to be passive (Vietnamese Paraprofessional).

Other ethnic groups include dozens of hill tribes in the central highlands, Cambodians who are living along the Mekong River Delta on the southern tip of the country, and some Sino-Vietnamese, Vietnamese of Chinese descent, who live in the suburb of Cholon in Ho Chi Minh City. Cholon is almost all Chinese (Wright, 1989).

Socio-Cultural Environment

I have been in the new land (U.S.) with the experience my biological family taught me when I was a child that really helpful when I left them (16 year old unaccompanied male).

According to Nguyen-Hong-Nhiem (1989) Vietnamese young people in the U.S. are influenced greatly by their family ideology. Therefore, it is important to gain at least some understanding of what those values and beliefs are.

While Vietnam may be a backward country economically, the Vietnamese are a complex people, and there are many ancient rules that tell them how they should conduct their lives.

The Vietnamese World View

The major religion in Vietnam is Buddhism. Other religions include Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, and dozens of religions among the hill tribes. The Vietnamese tend to have a "pluralistic approach to life, which does not preclude, for example, identifying oneself as Buddhist and practicing Christianity at the same time. They search out alternative approaches to problems" (Dillard, 1987, p. 204).

While most Vietnamese are Buddhists, the philosophies of Chinese Confucianism and Taoism shape the Vietnamese world view. These teachings offer moral and practical guidance and link personal, family, social, and biological levels of existence (Khoa & Van Deusen, 1981). Traditional

teachings emphasize loyalty, filial piety, and submission of the individual to the common good.

Confucianism is a philosophy of life that provides guidelines on how people should behave (Forest, 1971; Khoa & Van Deusen, 1981). According to Confucianism, people are expected to be able to live together peacefully only if their minds are shaped by education and clear rules of conduct. Some rules of conduct include studying constantly and practicing self-examination, being reverent in worship, and sincerely respecting one's father and one's ruler. High morals and ethics, sound education, and honest government are greatly valued. Rulers are expected to protect the people as their own children, and the people, in return, maintain order by honoring good rulers.

Taoism is a belief in the occult/spirit world. It teaches that man's relationship with the universe is very important. This religion includes ancestor worship, which takes place in almost all Vietnamese homes (Dillard, 1987). It also involves a belief in good and bad winds which are believed to affect health and other aspects of life.

Socio-Cultural Values

Socio-cultural values are very closely linked with the Vietnamese world view. Children are taught these values by their parents and family as well as by their teachers in school and by religious figures in the community.

Respect. An important value in the Vietnamese society is respect. Traditionally, the Vietnamese have been brought up to respect and accept the opinions of their elders, or at least not to disagree openly (Dillard, 1987; Khoa & Van Deusen, 1981).

In a social situation it is very important to maintain harmony between speakers or to save the face of someone whose opinion might turn out to be wrong. Disagreement would be put in a subtle form of alternative suggestions or in a question (Vietnamese Paraprofessional).

First you learn to respect, then you learn Literature (Vietnamese proverb).

Education. Based on Confucianist teachings, education is highly valued in the traditional Vietnamese society, and parents tend to play an active role in their children's education (Dillard, 1987; Khoa & Van Deusen, 1981). In the Vietnamese culture, education is believed to be the best way to get respect (Caplan et al., 1989).

An uneducated person is like unpolished jade (Vietnamese Proverb).

A knife gets sharp through honing; a man get smart through study (Vietnamese Proverb).

When a father and a mother look away, the child becomes foolish; when father and mother look toward him, the child becomes smart (Vietnamese Proverb).

Hard work. Closely linked to education is the value of hard work which is believed to be the key to achievement and success in school and in work (Caplan et al., 1989).

Self-control. Another value in the Vietnamese society is self-control. From early childhood each individual is taught the art of self-control by both family and religion. This value is taught by means of rote learning of rituals such as manners and customs, by diversions such as lullabies, music, poetry, enjoyment of nature, contemplation, and through punishment of deviant behaviors (Dillard, 1987; Khoa & Van Deusen, 1981). Open expression of emotions is considered in bad taste except among very close relatives or friends. Closely linked to self-control are the values of modesty and humility.

According to Vietnamese custom, one should remain modest and humble, showing the extent of knowledge or skills only when asked. Modesty and humility for Vietnamese are important social graces. These are sometimes misunderstood by people from other cultures who think that we are insolent or impolite. But the Vietnamese behavior stems from the fact that we have been taught not to be demonstrative in public, especially not to express personal emotions which might be considered immodest or boastful (Vietnamese Paraprofessional).

Social recognition and admiration. Respect and admiration of an individual's peers are very important values among Vietnamese (Penner & Tran, 1977). Social recognition is linked to the Confucian ideology that emphasizes respect and admiration.

Cultural Expressions

One major form of cultural expression in Vietnam is the celebration of *Tet Nguyen Dan*, or Tet for short. It is

one big three-day celebration which seems to combine the elements of Christmas, birthdays, New Years, Easter, and the Fourth of July. Like a big birthday party, everyone's birth is celebrated with gifts of toys and money. Like Christmas it is a religious holiday. Like New Years it welcomes in the Vietnamese Lunar New Year. Like Easter it comes in the spring. Like the Fourth of July there are parades in the streets and firecrackers.

It was fun in Vietnam and when New Years Day was coming it was more fun than the other days. When the New Year was coming every family around my house were playing with fireworks and when the sun was coming up we went to see the animals at something like a zoo and we went to play games. Mom gave money to my brother and sisters and I (15 year old male).

The celebration of Tet revolves around *Ong Tao*, the Spirit of the hearth which protects the family from bad spirits that are always trying to get in (Dillard, 1987; Hickey, 1964). At Tet *Ong Tao* leaves the family to report to the Jade emperor on whether the family had been good all year. With *Ong Tao* gone the family has no protection against the bad spirits lurking around, so they set off firecrackers to scare them away. On the eve of Tet, *Ong Tao* returns. At midnight, the Spirits of the Ancestors also come to celebrate Tet with their living family. Then, on New Years day everyone goes to the pagoda to worship, join a parade, or visit with friends. The children dress up in their new clothes and receive toys and gifts of money to play the gambling games. Tet ends with one last feast

for the departing ancestors.

The Vietnamese believe that bad and good signs are everywhere and whatever happens on the first day of the new year will happen the rest of the year.

Home and Family Environment

The students in this study had similarities as well as a variety of differences in their home and family life.

Housing

Climate influences the housing styles. In the cooler areas many people build simple wood or bamboo houses with tiled roofs. In the warmer areas most homes are made of palm leaves or straw. In the modern towns and cities, homes are made of wood, brick, and tile.

The difference between my home in my country and here is that was built from different materials (14 year old male).

My house wasn't very big. It was made of coconut palm leaves and wood (16 year old male).

In Vietnam not like the U.S. The houses are different. The way of living are different. At home I and my family are farming, but not in the U.S. (15 year old female).

Virtually every Vietnamese home has an altar in a prominent place. This altar is covered with red and gold paper, which are the national colors, and holds smoldering incense, candles, scrolls, and snacks for offerings. Pictures of deceased relatives are often displayed on these altars as are symbols of one's God.

One of the students in this study wrote about and illustrated his home and family life in Vietnam. Like many others in this study, this student's family are farmers.

I am very happy that you would like to know about my background, my "family life." You know that the people all over the world have different ways of living, housing farming, etc. Like my family, we built houses right on the farm. The houses we built are separate and different shapes [Figure 2].

A big house, we called the "main house," it included some bedrooms on one side [Figure 3], the other side is a big living room. In the living room we decorate. Right in the middle we put a table and some chairs for invite someone or someone visit. At three corners we put 3 big beds for sleeping or sitting. At the other corner we put a closet. On the walls we hang an o'clock and some of the pictures of God we believe.

Another house is right on the left side of the main house. We use to store things on one side, the other side is a dining room. Every member of my family must be there at 7:00 AM and PM for breakfast and dinner. When we eat we have to share the new ideas or any problem was happen.

Between the main house and store house is a driveway. At the end of the driveway is a bathroom. Outside the bathroom is a place we use to wash the dishes. The kitchen is located between the bathroom and storehouse. Behind the bathroom is a pig house. Next to the pig house is a restroom. We built like that because we thought if the fire happen it can destroy only one house, not all the houses we built.

On the farm we grow crops. Coffee and black pepper are main crops. We also grow several kinds of fruit. We like to work in farm than in factory because all of family work together and do the same jobs. Also, we can take break anytime we want. When we don't to work we can take a day off to go around (16 year old male).

Family

The Vietnamese society is built on strong family ties. Traditionally, Vietnamese are raised to place a high value on a cohesive extended family relationship network.

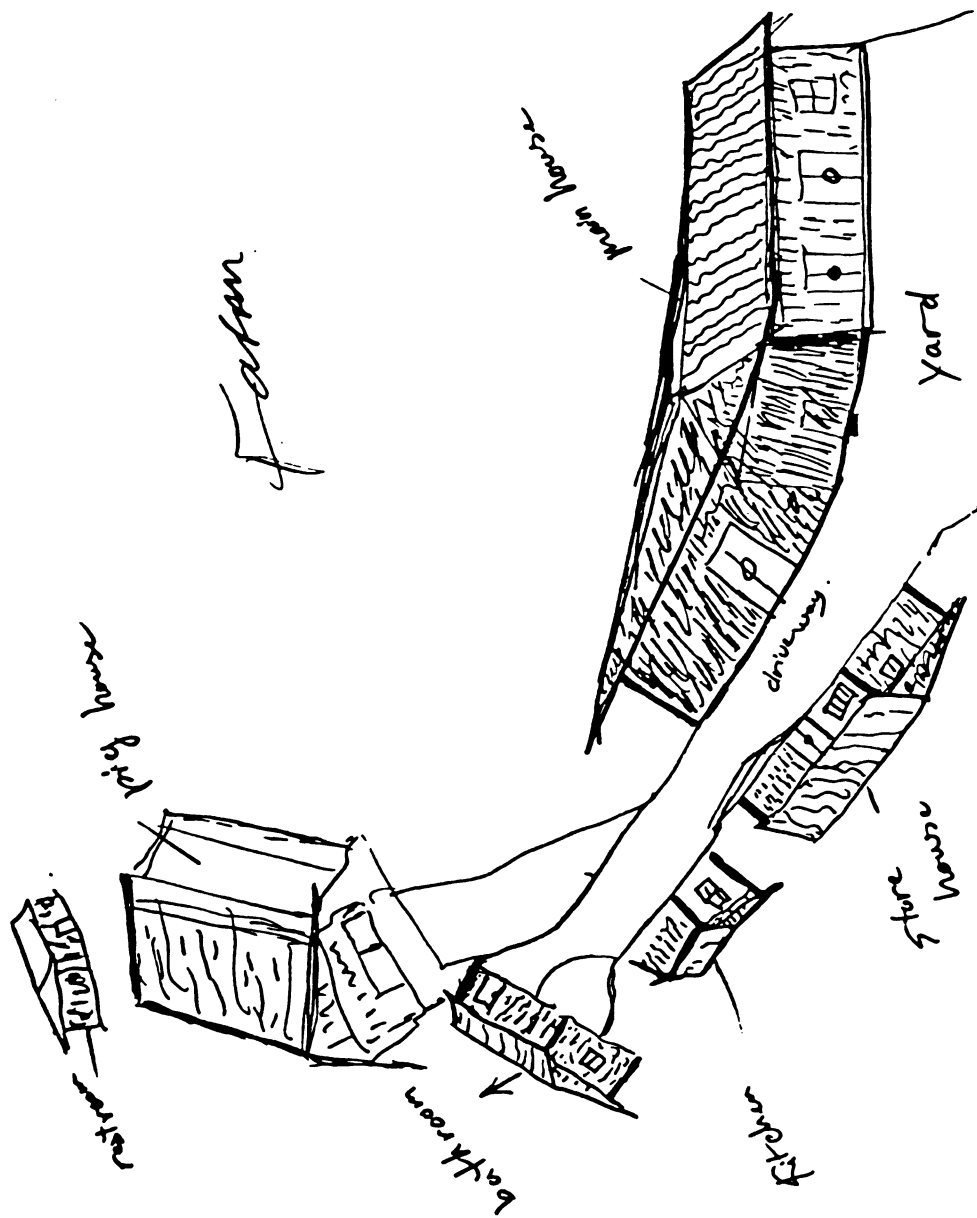


Fig. 2: Farm

Based on the surveys and life histories, most of the students in this study had between five and 18 members living under one roof. The most common household composition consisted of mother, siblings, and at least one grandparent. Other compositions included fathers, cousins, aunts, and uncles.

In Vietnam the individual owes loyalty to the family before all else and holds the family interest above personal/self interest (Brown, 1982; Penner & Tran, 1977). Typically, the Vietnamese family is highly structured. There is a hierarchy of priorities with parental ties paramount. For example, a son has distinct obligations and duties to his parents that assume a higher value than obligations to his siblings. Next in priority are sibling relationships which are considered permanent. Expectations of helping out the family, assuming responsibility, working hard, and achieving pervade parent-child relationships (Dillard, 1987). These roles and responsibilities are quite evident in the students' writings in the following chapters.

When given the material resources, the family has both the desire and personnel to provide unconditional help to its network of kin (Timberlake & Cook, 1984). In this network, the rich take care of the poor; the strong take care of the weak; the healthy take care of the sick. Thus, the family is the primary caretaker of its members' physical, social, and emotional well-being.

Traditionally, Vietnamese families are patriarchal. The oldest male is head of the family, and his oldest son is the second most important family member. Children, particularly female children, are given very little freedom to meet individual needs. The individual's primary responsibility is to the family and to society. Females are taught to adhere to an obedient role in family and society. The hierarchy for obedient behavior among Vietnamese women is to obey the father, then their husbands, and then the eldest sons, should the father die. This ideology underscores "filial piety and the subservience of women to, first, their fathers, and later in life, their husbands" (Penner and Tran, 1977, p. 189). Some have "internalized the subservient role assigned to them in the Vietnamese culture" (p. 201). Two females in this study provide illustration of their role as females in the Vietnamese family and society.

#1

S: I worry about my future because what my mom wants and what I want are different. I should do what she wants because she's my mom.

I: That's important to you, isn't it?

S: Yes. But its hard.

I: Are Vietnamese children taught to follow their parents' decisions even when they are adults?

S: Yes, especially girls until they're married.

I: Even regarding the person they marry?

S: Yes (Field notes, February 13, 1990).

#2

*S: (Had been talking about her boyfriend)**I: Are you planning on marrying your boyfriend?**S: Probably.**I: Do you love him?**S: (Pause) Uhm. Yeh. Besides my mother likes him.**I: Would you marry him even if you didn't love him, if your mother wanted you to?**S: Probably. That the way it is in Vietnam culture. Vietnamese girls have to obey their parents.**I: Even in marriage?**S: Yeh (January 23, 1990).*

In the Vietnamese family, the grandparents are the ones responsible for transmitting guidelines for social behavior, preparing younger people for handling stressful life events, and serving as a source of support in coping with life crises (Brown, 1982; Weroha, 1989). One of the common losses the students in this study mentioned over and over was missing extended family, particularly grandparents. One can begin to understand the depth of this loss when one begins to understand the role of grandparents in the lives of the young.

I was born in Vietnam. I lived with my mother, sister and my grandparents. My grandparents are very nice. They bring me with them almost everywhere they go. I am now in America. My grandparents are in Vietnam. I miss them very much (15 year old female).

War and Post-War Environments

Vietnam is a very small country with a long history of struggling for survival. Although, after one

thousand years dominated by the Chinese, hundred years under the rules of the French, the Vietnamese people still speak Vietnamese language and preserve their own culture. In 1954 the Republic of Vietnam was attacked by the communists and narrowed to the southern part of Vietnam and completely fell into the hands of communism in April, 1975 (Bilingual Paraprofessional).

For centuries Vietnam has been subjected to social turmoil. The majority of the students in this study were born toward the end of the Vietnam war. Their writings reflect the impact of that war on their own and their family's lives and the impact of living under communism.

My father was born in North Vietnam. In 1945, When the communists had taken over North Vietnam my grandparents and father fled and came to Saigon, South Vietnam. Then South Vietnam belonged to the French. I was born and grew up there. Before the communists our lives were very happy because we had freedom. But on April 30th, 1975, the North Vietnamese communists attacked Saigon and took over all of South Vietnam and took away our freedom. I hope in future Vietnam will have freedom for all people. I hope the world finish war and have peace forever (17 year old male).

I was born in 1972 in a village. It was a poor village. When my mother was giving birth the communist and Vietnam Army was fighting around my house and my mother almost lost me. My mom and dad worked all the time, but they never had enough money to take care of a family (18 year old male).

I am 16 years old. I was born in a small village in South Vietnam. I'm always thinking about my childhood memories. I had many friends. But after 1975 when the Communist forces overpowered South Vietnam, the people lived in poverty and harsh rulers under Communism. When I was in 9th grade I stopped going to school. My mother told me "you cannot live under Communism, you need a good future." She really didn't want me to leave (every mother is like that). But she did. Because of my future (16 year old male).

A student at school #2, shared in some depth about the

impact of the war on his life.

I was born in 1972 in a small village in South Vietnam. I was born at the time of the war between North and South Vietnam. Sometimes I remember the North and South Vietnam fighting. My mother gave me some sweetened condensed milk because she thought that if South Vietnam was defeated she could escape easily and not worry about food for me.

After a few years, when I was no longer a baby, but a boy, I would play with some children who lived near my house. Sometimes there was fighting, and I had to run home quickly and go down to the basement to hide in the corner because I was very afraid. Sometimes bombs dropped near my hiding place. Then I couldn't hear anything.

I don't like war because it can kill everybody. I remember sometimes I saw bombs drop on the ground, and they destroyed a big place. In some places many people died, you know? Some people lost a hand or a leg.

I remember a day I will never forget in all my life. It was March 1975, I think, and there was fighting in Xuan Loc day after day. Everybody who lived there had to move. My family couldn't hide in the basement as before, so we had to move too. We moved to Saigon. After a few weeks in Saigon, South Vietnam was defeated by North Vietnam so there wasn't anymore fighting. So my family moved back to our house. We lived there for a long time.

After the war stopped, I went to school to study Vietnamese education. Even though they were not fighting anymore, South and North Vietnam were ruled by the communists. At that time I thought Vietnam had independence, peace and freedom. But it's not true because the Vietnamese people are ruled by the leader of the communist party. They can not go anywhere and can't form a corporation or do anything (18 year old male).

Impact on the Family Environment

With the fall of Saigon and the defeat of South Vietnam, three main groups of people faced persecution -- those who had worked for or had been associated with the former regime, e.g., officials and soldiers, those who had been associated or worked for Americans, and ethnic Chi-

nese. Many of the soldiers and officials were killed. Those who had worked with the former regime or with the Americans were imprisoned in "re-education camps."

Re-education camps are hard labor camps where the prisoners are treated badly. They are brainwashed, beaten, and are not given much food. Some are starved. They are forced to do hard manual labor such as clearing dense forest. Many get sick and die. Some, like my brother-in-law, became so desperate that they could not go on living any longer and took their own life (Vietnamese Paraprofessional).

The families of these men also suffered. They were refused food and faced a number of hardships due to discriminatory policies and practices. One of the common impacts of the war on the families of the students in this study was the creation of father absent homes. This seems to cut to the very heart of the Vietnamese home life and traditions which center around patriarchal leadership. Over half of the students grew up in homes without a father. When compared by schools, the students in the different schools showed unique patterns. Data revealed that 41% of the students in school #1, 62% of students in school #2, and 90% of the students at school #3 were from fatherless homes.

One of the major impacts on the family was death of fathers and older brothers in the war.

Before 1975 my father was in the army for Viet Cong. He died in 1974, and at that time I was one year old. My mother died in 1980 of sickness. My family consisted of 11 members. All my older brothers and sisters had family of their own so I and my other sister moved to live with my uncle (17 year old male).

My father was die in my country at wartime (15 year old male).

I don't remember my father. He died fighting in war (16 year old male).

A majority of the students in this study experienced the absence of their fathers for several years due to imprisonment for having been associated with the former government, for having fought with the South, and/or for having been associated with Americans.

I am 16 years old. I was born in Saigon, South Vietnam. I was born at the time of the war between North and South Vietnam. Many people died in that war. In 1975 South Vietnam lost the war. My country then belonged to the Communists. My father was an officer in the South Vietnam army. Then the North Vietnam government took my father to prison. After 5 years, my father came back to our home (16 year old male).

My family grew up on a farm. Before 1975, my father was a soldier for the army in South Vietnam. After 1975, the Communists won the war. They went to South Vietnam and they took my father to jail because my father worked for the American army. Then my family had many problems. (15 year old male).

Before 1975 my father was in the army and my mother was involved in business. After 1975 my father was in jail and my mother had to take care of the family.

Some homes were without fathers because the fathers were American GIs (Chapter 9). In other cases the fathers escaped Vietnam at the end of the war or following imprisonment. A few students in this study were sponsored by their fathers whom they had not seen in years. One shares his story below:

I was born in Saigon, South Vietnam. I was the first child in my family. I grew up in a small town. My family was kind of poor. My parents worked very hard to feed us. My dad was in the Navy working for the Republic of South Vietnam. One day in the Spring of 1975 when the Vietnam war was almost ended, my dad left my family to come to America. He couldn't go back home to get us because it was very dangerous and he would have got shot if he came back. I thought I would never see my dad again. But a few months later, my family received a letter from him. He said that he was safe in America and later he would bring us to America with him. I was very happy my dad was still alive.

I tried to work hard to help my mom take care of my brother and sister. I was very happy when I heard that my family would come to America very soon, because my dad had already sent the document to the Vietnamese Government, and they said we could go. In May, 1986, my mother went to the Airport to get the Airline ticket, and we left Vietnam five days later.

When we arrived in Michigan, I was the last to get off the airplane and I saw my dad hugging my mom and there were some tears in his eyes. Now I was seeing my dad after not seeing him for 11 years (18 year old male).

Many families lost everything after the war. Their property, possessions, and means of livelihood were taken away.

The Communists came into our home and took all our possessions (18 year old male).

The confiscation of family possessions and livelihood impacted the families in a number of ways, not the least being that mothers had to enter the work force while fathers were jailed and later denied employment.

Before 1975, my dad worked for the Americans. After 1975 the communists took him to jail. My mom had to become a seller in the market. When my dad got out of jail, he couldn't get a job. He had to stay at home. Then one day he left. He escaped Vietnam (17 year old male).

A female Vietnamese student (age 16) shared that prior to 1975 her father had been a chief of police. After the war he was taken to Hanoi and imprisoned there for five years. Her mother was only allowed to visit him once a year. While in prison he was treated badly and degraded and did not have enough food to live on. Her mother would bring a years supply of food for him each time she visited. After five years, he was transferred to a prison in the South, near Saigon. He was there for two years and then released. He reentered the household after seven years of absence. He was unable to find work while his wife continued to work at the job on which she had been supporting the family. He could not accept the situation, so he tried to escape Vietnam but was caught and imprisoned again (Field notes, March 1, 1990).

Multiple changes in home and family make it difficult to get an accurate description of individual families, much less to be able to provide a group profile. Perhaps the change itself is a group characteristic. Multiple changes are a definite theme throughout the students' writings and were portrayed most graphically in their timelines. Some are shared below. Those that have been translated from Vietnamese are preceded with an asterisk (*).

- * 1972 -- Born in Saigon
 - 1976 -- Moved to Nha Trang after communist took over South Vietnam
 - 1978 -- Started School
 - 1980 -- Quit school; got a job as fisherman (age 8)
 - 1981 -- Moved back to Saigon
 - 1986 -- Left Vietnam (age 15); lived in Philippines
 - 1987 -- Lived in Texas
 - 1989 -- Moved to Michigan (17 year old male)
-
- * 1971 -- I was born in Vo Dac
 - 1975 -- Communists took over South VN
 - 1976 -- Moved to Da Lat
 - 1978 -- I start school; my brother was born
 - 1979 -- Moved to Thu Duc; I quit school and helped work on farm

1981 -- Went back to school
 1983 -- Moved to Saigon; I quit school
 1988 -- Left Vietnam, went to Thailand then the
 Philippines
 1989 -- Came to America (18 year old male)

1973 -- I was born
 1975 -- My father in jail; my brother born
 1976 -- We move to a different place
 1977 -- My mother start working job
 1978 -- I start school
 1980 -- My father came home from jail
 1982 -- My sister was born
 1983 -- My grandmother come to live with us
 1984 -- I was 1st student in math in my school
 1985 -- I was in trouble in Vietnam, went to jail
 1986 -- I escape from Vietnam
 1987 -- I escape from Malaysia
 1988 -- I come to America; I start school
 1989 -- I move to a different school; I move to a
 different house (16 year old male)

Impact on the Socio-Economic Environment

*My country is very poor and in my country there is
 no freedom for anyone (16 year old male).*

Initially, after the fall of Saigon in April 1975, communist rule in South Vietnam was not drastically different from before -- many people were able to continue their same occupations and to live more or less as they had been (Feith, 1988). However, after a few months and as the communists consolidated their regime, conditions became more difficult. Due to a combination of bad management, low investment, and natural disasters, food production declined. Many people were moved from the cities into the New Economic Zones, where they had to clear forests and attempt cultivation.

The family socio-economic status of the students in this study ranged from middle to low class. The most common occupations of the parents were farming and street vending/open air market (Table 6). In several cases these two occupations were combined.

Table 6: Occupation of Parents in Vietnam

Occupation	F	M	Total
Farmer	6	14	20
Street/Market Vender		12	12
Tailor	1	3	4
Factory Worker	2	2	4
Store Clerk	1	2	3
Fisherman	2		2
Own Business	1	1	2
Carpenter	1		1

The students writings reflect a range of life styles and socio-economic conditions while growing up in Vietnam. Some had a comfortable life in Vietnam, others revealed lives of hardship.

I was born in Saigon, the old capital of South VN before 1975. After 1975, Saigon still was the

biggest city in VN. It a noisy, busy city. I will never forget my childhood. I lived in a medium sized home but enough material things and it was very comfortable. My mom was a great mom. She took very good care of us. My dad was in jail for a long time. He got out and stay at home several years before I escape VN. I have three sisters. We were all top students in school. But I didn't ever study. Just my sisters because I was very lazy. My mom is a business woman. She made a lot of money. My sisters and I didn't have to work so we loved her very much. Every weekend, my mom would take us to the restaurant and sometimes we went to the beach. Besides that we had our own enjoyments. I always went to the movies, cafeteria, dancing etc. with my friends and my girl friend. I had a bike and a motorcycle so that I can ride everywhere. I like soccer, that's the best sport in my country (16 year old male).

- * In Vietnam my family was so poor. We didn't have food to eat. We have to work so hard in order to survive (18 year old female).

My home in VN very poor. I can't do anything in VN. I must pay the money for school. But in U.S. I can go to school. I can do something (15 year old male).

I was born and grew up in a village in South Vietnam. When I was young, just like other kids, I left my parents and went to school every day. My house wasn't very big. It was made of coconut and palm leaves and wood. Most of my mom's love was spent on me because I was her only child. I went to school everyday and after school I helped my grandparents do things. They had a shop fixing the cars and engines, etc. Because of that, my family had a better standard of living than other families did. I think I was luckier than the other kids who were my age. I had enough food to eat, clothes to wear, and when I got sick my parents could buy medicines (17 year old male).

Educational Environment

The students in this study came from a range of educational experiences and environments, though some common patterns can be seen.

I spent most of my life in An Giang. At the age of 6, I started school in Kindergarten. After one year, I was in first grade of elementary school and I went

there for five years. Then, I began high school in sixth grade and finished in ninth grade. I studied very hard because all my classes were very difficult. I usually went to school 5 days a week by bike [Figure 4]. The distance between my house and school was about a half mile. My school always began at 7:00 AM and dismissed at 12:00. I didn't have lunch at school but I had only 15 minutes for break time and 15 minutes for exercise during the five hours. I had a lot of friends in school. They were very friendly because I was a good soccer player. When I got home from school, I helped my family do (16 year old male).

To enter public secondary schools (6th grade), the student must pass a national competitive entrance exam. Results of semiannual tests determine whether the student is promoted upward or has to repeat his grade. The student must pass all subjects. Failure in even one subject will cause him/her to fail the whole year. At the end of grade 12, the student takes a national examination to obtain the Tu Tai diploma which is equivalent to French Baccalaureate.

Some of the students in this study attended large schools in Saigon, others attended small schools in villages. Some of the village schools only had elementary education. Because of that, those who wanted to continue their schooling went to live with relatives in the city and attend school there.

The students in this study described their Vietnamese schools in the following ways:

Unlike America the children in Vietnam stay home without education by choice of the parents. It depends where you live, like a small village. In America there is more materials and equipments in school than in Vietnam. You have to pay money for school in Vietnam. And there is no lights in the school (17 year old female).

School in my country different with school in U.S. School in my country very small [Figure 5]. It doesn't have any light. Students must pay the money for school every month (13 year old male).

When I was 5 went to school, I walked to school every day. In the class they taught me the alphabet and how to pronounce words. When I was in first grade I studied math. School was just half day. Every student took a class. I had a textbook, but no notes or study sheets from the teacher. In my class they taught in the Vietnamese language. When the person was a fifth grader, they started to study other languages. I flunked two grades. School started in September. We celebrated New Years and other holidays. We didn't go to school when there was a holiday (17 year old male).

I went to school about 1 mile away from my house. It was a very big school. It had four floors [Figure 6]. There were alot of students in that school. I had many friends to have fun with on break time. I liked my chemistry teacher. She was my favorite teacher. She helped me alot to learn until I graduated from middle school (17 year old male).

Work or School

School in Vietnam costs money for individual students, and only those who have the money can attend school.

Several wrote that they were not be able to afford school.

Instead, they worked to help support the family. The ages they began working ranged from six to 15. The types of jobs they did were: farming, fishing, selling lottery tickets, selling things on the street/street vending, carrying things for people, pedicab helper, taking care of the house and younger siblings while parents worked.

When I was 9 years old I quit going to school. Me and my brother walked around selling tickets [lottery tickets] every morning. We had to wake up at 5:00. Then we walked about 20 miles or more. We had to sell all the tickets. If we were not done with selling the tickets we had to pay for it (16 year old male).

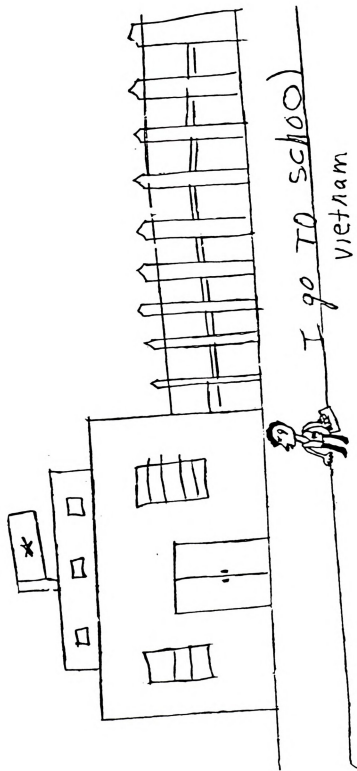


Fig. 5: Village School

When our family lived in Vietnam, we had to work hard every day to earn money for living. Most Vietnamese children that are 5 or 6 years old and older didn't have a chance to go to school because their family are poor and they needed children to stay home to cook, watch the house and to take care of brothers and sisters. My family was a farmer so I didn't get a chance to go to school because I have to stay home and work (18 year old female).

My family live in VN. My father is a farmer and my mother is a farmer too. When I live in VN I don't go to school. I at home and helped my father working because my family too poor [Figure 7]. I don't have enough food to eat. My family don't have money give me go to school. Now I live in the U.S. I can go to school and study. I have enough food to eat (15 year old male).

- * My family were working real hard in order to get enough food to eat. Being a little child, I had to quit school to help my sister carry vegetables to the market and I had to help sell them everyday from morning to evening [Figure 8] (17 year old female).

Role of Teachers

Traditional Vietnamese learning theories emphasize memorization and recitation of Confucian ethics. Knowledge is conveyed from teachers to students without any challenge. Students are not encouraged to ask questions or to demonstrate creative ability (Dillard, 1987). Most importantly, students are taught to respect teachers.

In Vietnam school disciplines is more severe than America. Students must respect their teachers like parents (17 year old female).

Traditionally, the teacher was considered as the spiritual father (both morally and academically) who guided his student to the right path in life. The terms "Thầy" (father, teacher) and "Cô" (aunt, teacher) have been used by students in Vietnam for many centuries to address their teachers (Vietnamese Paraprofessional).

I Live in VIET NAM. AND I hope my father work a
 farmer



Fig. 7: Working on the Farm

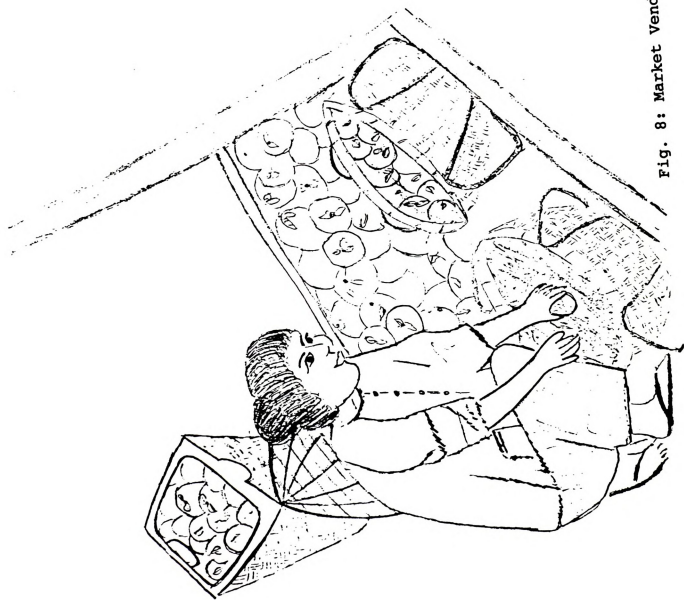


Fig. 8: Market Vendor

The students are taught to stand up when the teacher enters the class and sit down when the teacher gives permission to do so. Inside a Vietnamese classroom, the courtesy observed is silence, to allow the teacher to speak without interruption and classmates to study without interference (Vietnamese Paraprofessional).

Changes in Education After 1975

Vietnamese society and its educational system has been subjected to the often time forced introduction of new concepts, values, practices, and ideologies of foreign cultures. French colonialism, Chinese and Soviet communism, and American capitalism all marched through their lives. Today, the educational system has a close link with productive labor and social activities in an effort to "wipe out the remnants of backward ideas like studying in order to gain a higher position" (Cohon, 1983, p. 153).

Traditional Confucianist teachings emphasized revering and respecting fathers as authority figures at home and respecting and revering teachers as authority figures in the community. It seems that when Marxism took over, there began a subtle destruction of family values.

What happened was teachers remained authority figures in the community, but fathers began to lose authority in the home. Parents who retained traditional values in home had to do so subtly. Parents who were aware of communist manipulation in school would wisely counsel their children to show respect and to pretend like you accept all the teaching. But you treat it like you treat a chicken: you keep the good and throw away what you don't like (Vietnamese Paraprofessional).

After 1975 the curriculum in the schools changed in a

number of ways. In the area of language arts, English and French classes were thrown out and Russian was put in.

When I was in sixth grade, I had to take a language class (Russian). I really didn't want to take it, but I had to (16 year old female).

Another change was the inclusion of Marxist teachings in the curriculum.

At school I was study about things, but I didn't understand about the communism (15 year old male).

At school there was a lot of communistic subjects and new education (14 year old male).

There seems to have also been a change in orientation.

Before 1975 there was an emphasis on academics. Today emphasis is on indoctrination of Marxist teaching, less time on academics with the exception of math, and more time on competitive community work and physical labor to improve the community. The students are taught to be competitive in working for the party and community in the framework of clubs similar to boy scouts and girl scouts. The old way was replaced by the new way. School awards used to be given for academics, but they are now being given to kids who do the most for the communist party or community (Vietnamese Paraprofessional).

None of the students in this study attended school beyond 9th grade in Vietnam (Figure 9). Many of the students wrote about being denied education because their fathers had been associated with the South Vietnamese government or army.

The Vietnamese communists put my father in prison because he was an air force sergeant before 1975. I couldn't go to school any more (17 year old male).

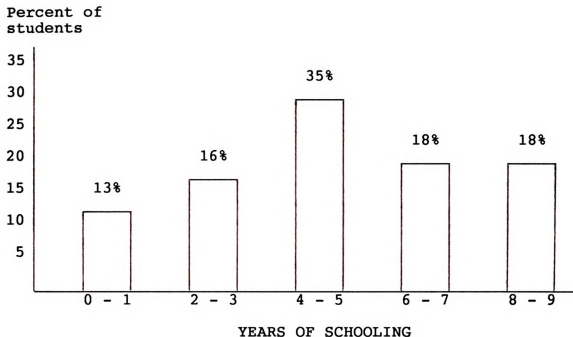


Figure 9: Highest Grade Completed in Vietnam

I went to elementary school. I was very intelligent. After a few years I was in 6th grade. When I reached 9th grade they wouldn't allow us to go to continue school. I didn't know why they didn't want me to go to school anymore! [Figure 10] (16 year old male).

My oldest sister was an engineer after studying 5 years in college. She is very smart so she could go to college, although the government hates some students who have fathers or brothers who worked in the South Vietnamese government before 1975 (16 year old male).

Some students who's fathers and brothers fought with the South and were associated with Americans left school because they were persecuted by teachers and students and were called "Nguy" which is a very degrading word. It means "despicable, deceiver, enemy." Americans were called "Mý Nguy" during the war (Vietnamese Paraprofessional).

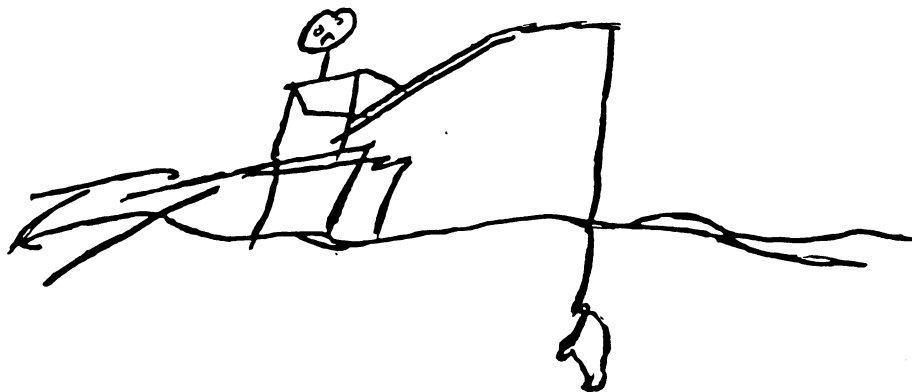
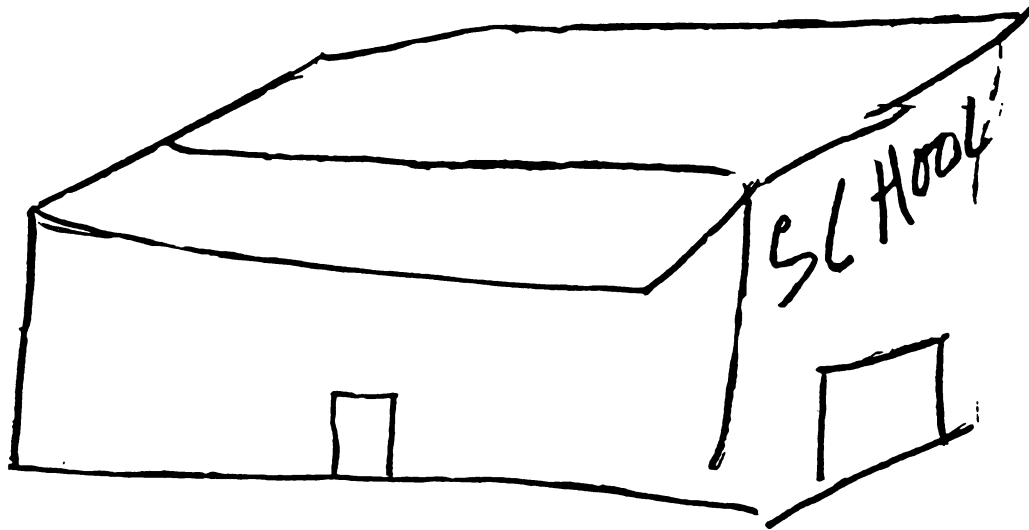


Fig. 10: Denial of Education

Summary

The students in this study came from the north, south, and central regions of Vietnam. Although each of these areas of Vietnam differs in dialects, housing, and general characteristics, they all adhere to a culture which emphasizes Confucian values and ethics. Thus, most of the young people in this study were raised to respect and obey their elders and those in authority, particularly teachers, parents, and grandparents. Most were taught to value education, interdependence, and responsibility for the good of the family. However, with the war and postwar environments, there seems to have been a gradual erosion of many of the values of traditional Vietnamese society.

While the young people in this study had a wide range of backgrounds and experiences, most experienced some form of hardship due to war and postwar environments because their families had been associated with the South Vietnamese army/government or with the Americans. These hardships included father absence from the home, mothers entering the work force, extreme poverty and near starvation, and denial of education.

Chapter 6

FINDINGS III: LEAVING HOME

In Vietnam there is a modern saying: "If the electric light poles had feet, they would try to leave" (Caplan et al., 1989, p. 6).

Leaving one's homeland with the irreversible severing of ties with family, kin, and friends is a heart wrenching experience that will bear its impact on the Vietnamese refugees for the rest of their lives. The reality of never being able to return home is even more weighty when one realizes that over half of those leaving are under the age of 18. What motivates the exodus of such a young generation? What is the context of their leaving, and what experiences do they encounter in the process?

This chapter will explore these questions as they relate to the young people in this study.

Deciding to Leave

Most of the students in this study left Vietnam at the urging of their families. This was true even among the unaccompanied minors who stated that the decision to leave was made by parent(s) and/or grandparent(s). Most had mixed feelings about leaving. Many did not want to leave at all but, as one student stated, "My family made the decision, and I did not dare protest their opinion."

Having this major life-changing decision made for them

may seem "wrong" to those brought up in the U.S. culture which values individualism, manifested in making one's own decisions regarding one's life. In Vietnamese society, however, decision making is not done by the person most affected by the decision but by the occupant of a traditional role in the social group (Stewart, 1979).

First of all, I introduce my family. I have four brothers and three sisters and a mother. They are still living in Vietnam. They are all tailors. I don't have a father because he became sick and died when I was nine years old.

I escaped Vietnam on June 8, 1986. The reason I left that I didn't like the communist because they didn't let all of us had freedom. They also had a lot of weapons to control the people. So my mom realized about that and told me to leave Vietnam for a better life. During that time I didn't want to leave my country. I was making money for helping my family. Also I wouldn't like to live away from my relatives. Later I was convinced by her. She said, "You have to leave as soon as possible. By the way you have freedom of religion, speech, press, petition and a good education. If you don't, I'm sure you will become a soldier of the communism when you get 18 years old, and then they will send you to Cambodia for killing the Cambodian."

At that time I really understood how the government of Vietnam ruled. But I still had some curious about who I was going with, when I was leaving, how I was escaping and how much it cost. She replied that I was leaving alone by boat on the eighth of June 1986. It cost about 150 gram gold. During that time I knew I would never see my family again. So I was very sad and crying. She was crying too. She said, "Don't ever worry about those things, the God will bless you. Everything will be fine" (16 year old male).

Reasons for Leaving

The young people in this study gave a variety of reasons for leaving Vietnam, though some common themes were noted (Table 7).

Table 7: Reasons for Leaving Vietnam (N=36)

Responses	Percent*
For My Future	52
To Find Freedom	50
Because of the Government/Communists	19
Not Allowed to Go to/Continue School	16
Didn't Want to Go Into the Army	16
To Help My Family Come to U.S.	13
Because I'm Amerasian	13
Reunion With Family in U.S.A.	11
Hunger and Poverty	11
I Don't Know	5
Had no Choice	2

* The total is more than 100 percent since a few students gave more than one answer.

For Freedom and the Future

Fifty-two percent of the students stated that the reason for leaving Vietnam was for a better future, and 50% stated it was for freedom. Some of the students combined these two together or combined one of these with other answers, such as education, to avoid induction into the army, and hunger/poverty.

From the time I lived in the camp and arrived in the U.S., I had to answer many people who asked me why

I had come to the U.S. I thought when the people left VN, everyone had their own reasons. Some people must have left because they hated the government. But others escaped VN because they wanted to find a better life in the new land.

I had a good life in Vietnam, but little by little I realized that was just temporary. I always asked myself, "Where's my future going?" because my mom can't protect me all my life. My father was an officer before 1975 so I couldn't go to college. In school they tricked me in everything about history. All the opposite of what my mom and dad taught me. That's why I escaped VN although I love my house, family, my friends, my city, etc. (16 year old male).

- * I am the oldest in my family. My parents were worried that I could not continue my education because my father had been in the South Vietnamese army. Because of my situation my parents made me move to the U.S.A. on November 9, 1988 (16 year old female).

After I was finished 9th grade, I had to stop my schooling. I had to stay at home. My parents decided me to leave my country. Because if I still in Vietnam I had to go to army and go to Cambodia and fight. I could get shot anytime. And the other reason that I would have no future if I still stay in Vietnam (17 year old male).

We lived in southern part of Vietnam. We escaped from South Vietnam for many reasons. Some of these reasons are because the communists from North Vietnam took over South Vietnam and ruled the southern and became government of Vietnam. No matter where you live in South Vietnam or what kind of job you have, the government takes everything that we own and our work money. Most of the families in Vietnam have 10 or 20 children in their family. They can't afford to give what they have and money to the government. If they give it all to the government, they would be starved and die. That is why a lot of families from Vietnam escape to have freedom (18 year old female).

The association of freedom with these other answers suggests that the word "freedom" has many meanings for these students. For many it means freedom from oppressive and discriminatory policies of their government. For others it means freedom from poverty and hunger/starvation.

And a few male students suggested that freedom to them meant "not being ordered around" and "doing what you want to do and no one can tell you can't."

Nineteen percent stated that the reason they left was because of the communist government. This involved not just the oppression and discriminatory practices, but fear on the parent's part of the indoctrination of their children.

My family told me to leave VN. The reason they told me to leave was they were afraid I would become a communist. I didn't want to leave, but I did, to please them (16 year old male).

For Family Reunion

Thirteen percent stated that one of the reasons they are here in the U.S. is to help their family come. This seems to be another cultural aspect of the decision to leave. The decision, in some cases, was not for the benefit of the individual as much as for the family.

I came from South Vietnam. I have mother, father, brother and two sisters. They are living in Vietnam. They want me to come to America and study hard and get good job so they can come to America (16 year old male).

Eleven percent left Vietnam in order to reunite with family already resettled in the U.S.

I was born in Ca Mau, Vietnam. My family has 9 people. In 1975 the Communist Vietnamese occupied Vietnam. My father didn't want anything to do with the Communist. My father told my family we had to move to Hau Giang. I lived in Hau Giang for 5 years. When my mother found my uncle, she wanted to live near

him. The communist said if my father worked for them I may go to school. My father asked me if I wanted to escape to America.

In 1984 my father, one sister and two brothers escaped from Vietnam. They went first to Malaysia. They wrote a letter to my mother. They lived in Malaysia for about 6 months then my father, one sister and 2 brothers went to the United States. They sent clothes, candy and pictures to us. The pictures looked very nice. I wanted to come to the United States.

I came to the United States in 1987 with two sisters and a brother. One day I went home and my mother had written a letter. She told us she was going to Malaysia. She then went to the Philippines. She studied 6 months. She and two sisters came to the United States in 1989. I'm very happy because my family is together (17 year old male).

Some family members who escaped Vietnam were never heard from again. Such losses had many impacts on the family, one of which was being a catalyst for younger members escaping.

When my older brother was 18 years old, he wanted to continue going to school but my government didn't allow him to go. They took my brother into the army. He stayed there a few days. Then he escaped the army and went home because he said in the army they didn't have enough food to eat and all the soldiers were very hungry. He said that he must escape. So he escaped Vietnam in 1982. After he escaped, my family did not get any letter or message from him. We thought he must have died in the ocean because at the time he escaped the weather was very bad. Later we got a letter from his friend and he let us know that my brother was dead.

We were sad when we heard about my brother's death. My parent's didn't want their children to escape Vietnam anymore. When I was older and wasn't allowed to go to school anymore, I asked my parents about my brother. I wanted to know why he died. I wanted to know more about his life. So they told me. After that I told my parents I must escape. They agreed to let me go. Before I escaped I thought I would die as my brother had. But I really didn't want to live in Vietnam anymore. I would have to go into the army and I would probably die anyway (17 year old male).

The Escape Plan

A number of factors enter into the escape plan, such as the means of escape, payment, and who, if anyone, would be accompanying the youth.

The students in this study utilized a variety of means for escaping. Some, mostly Amerasians, left legally under the Orderly Departure Program (ODP) and the Homecoming Act. They were flown out of the country (Chapter 10). One student utilized car, walking, and boat in her escape (Figure 11). Two students escaped through Cambodia on foot. The majority (78%) made their way out of Vietnam by boat.

Setting out to sea in fragile overcrowded vessels, Vietnamese boat people are confronted with enormous risks in their efforts to leave their own country. The boats seem to be becoming smaller every year (UNHCR, 1989). In 1988 several refugees were saved from disintegrating vessels which measured around 7.5 by 1.5 meters. These tiny crafts were built for coastal fishing or river travel, not for withstanding a gale on the high seas.

Several students wrote about the expense of the escape.

My parents tried to set up for my trip to flee. During that time my parents met a man who was a smuggler and was setting up a boat to escape. My parents talked with him and decided to get one seat for me in the boat. I had to wait about two months before the trip started. All seats in the escaping boat was too much money for the Vietnamese because of the danger. My parents paid for my seat by gold. It was about fifteen hundred dollars which was a very big bite for my family (15 year old male).

I left my country by car,
walk, and boat.

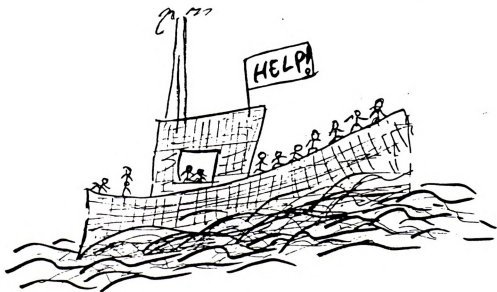
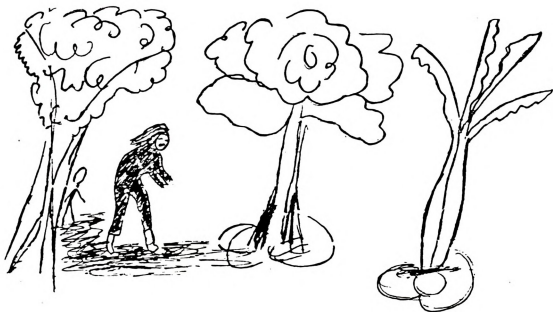


Fig. 11: Leaving Vietnam

I didn't have to pay any money because I could fix and control the machine for them (I was an auto mechanic) (17 year old male).

My parents gave me money to escape and I had to look for the way to escape I escaped Vietnam by boat. At the time I escaped I had to pay a lot of money. To earn that money I think one person needed to work about 10 years. The person I had to pay was a man who made a boat and found the way to escape (16 year old male).

Another aspect of the plan was who would accompany the youth on the journey. Thirty percent of the students were accompanied by their mothers, and 8% were accompanied by an adult other than parent, such as an older sibling, aunt, uncle, or acquaintance/friend of a parent. Only 3% had a father accompanying them on the journey.

Sixty-three percent of the students in this study made the journey alone as unaccompanied minors. The decision and the impact of such an experience is touched on by two students.

In the boat I left in there were 77 people. We had to stay on the ocean just 2 days but it was scary. If I had left with my family and friends, I feel that they could have taken care of me (15 year old male).

When the radio announce that the weather in the next five days is going to be fine, on that night we began to leave Vietnam. There were fifty people on my boat. They were all unfamiliar and I didn't know anyone. When the night came I looked up. There were the moon and stars. I thought about my family and my friends. I missed them and I will never see them again (16 year old male).

Perhaps a key factor is the age of the youths at the time of the escape. This may be particularly important if the youths were unaccompanied. Eleven percent were

preadolescents, 53% were early adolescents, 28% were middle adolescents, and 8% were late adolescents.

One of the students was 10 years old and had to take care of his eight year old brother throughout the journey because the father, who had accompanied them into the escape boat, jumped out at the last minute, leaving the two young boys to make the treacherous journey alone. It is unknown whether this was part of the plan to get the boys to leave or was simply a case of changing one's mind at the last minute.

Context of the Journey by Boat

A number of factors work together to provide a context for the escape by boat, such as the consequences if caught, piracy, and length of time to first destination.

Some of the students wrote about the consequences of attempting to escape Vietnam and being caught by the soldiers or police.

It was December 22, 1987. In the dark at night nobody can know we are escaping my country. I knew they would take us back to jail for about one or two years. But I decided to escape because I thought I had just two ways. The first way is to live, but I didn't want to live in a Communist country (17 year old male).

Most of the families that escape now they might be caught by the soldiers and might die. But they try anyway. Most of them think that if they stay in Vietnam, they will die sooner or later. Why not try to escape to have freedom. Maybe God will help you escape safely. If we get in the ocean we might die. But with God's help we will be all right (18 year old female).

When the weather on the sea was good, we leaved. But I was caught and got in jail (16 year old male).

One of the students wrote and illustrated his experience in escaping and being caught in the attempt (Figure 12).

The first time I tried to escape was not successful because the Vietnamese police knew we were escaping and they took us back. There were about 2 women with us and they were crying very much and told them we want to go to jail. But we did. The next time I decided to escape, there was a person who made the plans for me and told me things I should know. Before I left my country I had to wait about 3 months (16 year old male).

Another student (age 15) along with his uncle tried to escape Vietnam on foot by crossing through Cambodia to avoid the dangers of the sea. They were caught and attacked by police and beaten. Most of his possessions were stolen. Then they were forced to work in the fields in a hard labor camp. He eventually escaped to Thailand.

Some of the students in this study were jailed several times for trying to escape before they were finally successful in leaving their country. One student was caught eight times before he finally made it out of Vietnam. He drew a picture of himself in Vietnam -- behind bars (Figure 13).

I tried to leave my country many times but I was caught and got jail for three months each time. Jail in Viet Nam it was a hard time for me. In the jail I had seen things I didn't see before. I had to work hard. If not, I wouldn't have nothing to eat. But in jail I was learned something good, I knew what a price I had to pay for the word "FREEDOM" (17 year old male).

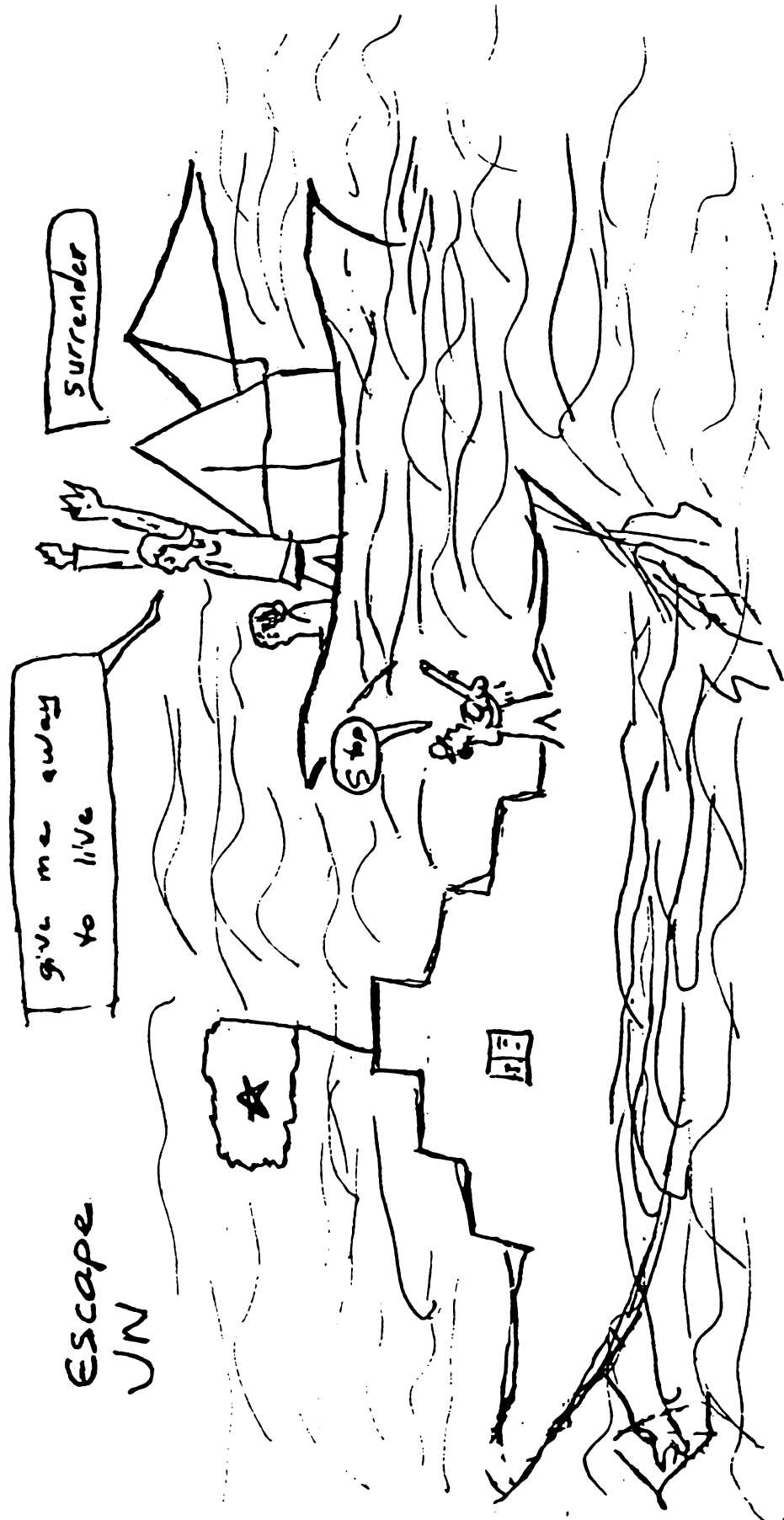
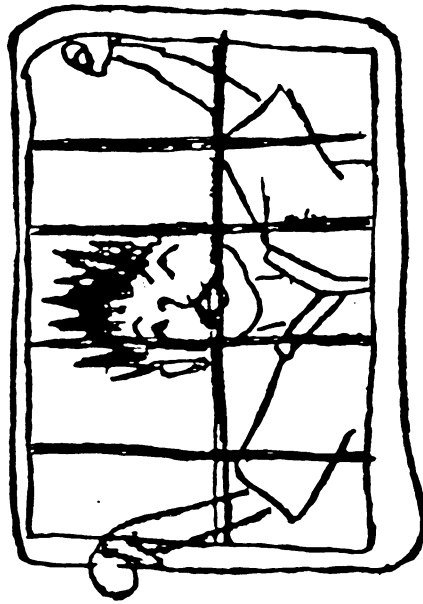


Fig. 12: Caught in Escape Attempt

Jail



leaving Vietnam

Fig. 13: Jailed for Escape Attempt

Because my father was an officer in the South Vietnam army, the North Vietnam government took my father to prison. After 3 years my father came back home. My parents decided we should escape Vietnam. My father and I tried to escape many times, but we failed. When I was 16 years old I finally got out of Vietnam. I wanted freedom and I was going to get it (18 year old male).

Another threat those who escaped by boat face was encounters with pirates. It is estimated that only half of the people who leave Vietnam make it to a country of first asylum (Biagini, 1989). The other half die from natural disasters, starvation, and pirate attacks. Eight percent of the students in this study stated that their boats were attacked by pirates.

Another traumatic aspect of the escape process was the length of time many spent on the high seas in overcrowded and unseaworthy boats, often without food or water. Thirty-three percent of the young people spent two to six days on the ocean before reaching their first destination. Forty-seven percent spent one to two weeks, and twenty percent spent three to six weeks at sea!

A disheartening aspect of the journey is that most of these boats are passed by and ignored by ships that could help (UNHCR, 1989). A few lucky ones are taken aboard merchant ships, naval vessels, fishing boats, oil rigs. At the time when they are rescued, the refugees are exhausted, starving, and dehydrated, and their boats are generally leaking. Typically ships pass within a kilometer, and some may briefly stop. However, they tend to ignore the

distress signals of the refugees who usually wave a white flag and burn a fire on deck.

Individual Experiences

A few students wrote about their escape. Their stories illustrate both the common experiences of all who leave Vietnam by boat, as well as the individual aspects of each one's journey. One student (15 year old male) who spent a month on the ocean drew a picture of that experience (Figure 14).

On very first day, we cross borderline on sea and we try to reach to Malaysia. One day we see boat. Oh my God, pirates! We so scared. They take money and jewelry. They let us live, thank God! Next day we get into storm. Wind blow very hard. High waves hit our boat very hard. Everyone get very cold. During that day we lose most our water and food. Day after day we go on with no water and no food (15 year old male).

I escaped Vietnam by boat. I was lost 5 days and 6 nights on the ocean. There were thirty persons on boat. I didn't see pirates, high waves or starvation. I thought I very lucky! (16 year old male).

On a day that was dark, at six-thirty at night, I went down into a small boat. My boat was about 50 feet long and about 20 feet wide. There were 67 people on the boat. Then the boat went. We started at Dai Noai river and it took about 1 hour to get out of that river. After a day in the boat I was on the ocean. On the first day I felt tired and I vomited. I couldn't eat anything. I was seasick. The next day I felt better and I could eat some rice and drink some water. We saw a lot of fish running after our boat and some of them leaped into the air in front of our boat. I was very afraid on the ocean because the boat I was in was very small compared to the ocean. I saw only water and sky. Sometimes the waves came and took the boat high. Then the waves sent and the boat came down quickly. That happened many times. I thought there was a 99 percent chance that I would die on the ocean, so I prayed for help. At that time I could only believe there was help because around the



I LEFT VN BY BOAT. I LIVE ONE MONTH ON THE OCEAN

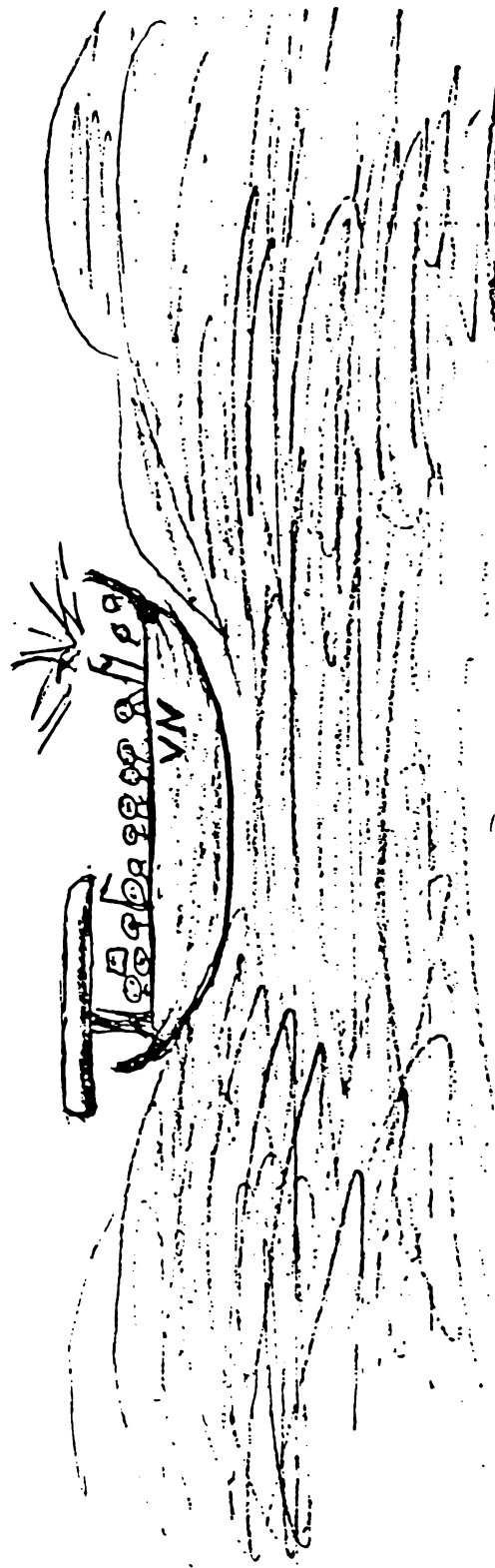


Fig. 14: Journey by Boat

boat was only water. Nobody lived there. We were on the ocean for four days. On the last day on the ocean we saw a lot of boats but they were too far away from us. At three o'clock in the afternoon we saw a city and it took us 3 hours to get there. Before we got there we saw an Indonesian boat. It was raining during this time and we felt cold. They gave us hot chocolate to drink and some medicine. After that they told us the directions to Malaysia. After 3 hours we landed in Malaysia and they gave us a lot of cookies and food to eat. None of us ate though because we were still tired. They kept us there for one day to interview us and then they took us to a refugee camp (17 year old male).

We left our home about midnight. We had to sit in a small boat to pass through the river. Then we changed to another boat which was ready to go to the ocean.

On the first day in the boat every body was very tired. Most of the people were vomiting or had headaches. We slept all the time. Two or three days later we woke up and looked around the boat. Oh, my God, the boat was very small. It was only 17 feet long, 7 feet wide and it contained 45 people!

Everyone in my boat thought that we would reach the island in only three or four days, like other boats we had heard about. But it was the opposite for us. We had to live on the boat for forty days because we lost our direction.

Everyone in my boat always prayed to God because we wanted to reach early and we really didn't want to see any pirates. On day six we had no more food or water. We thought that we would starve. But we were lucky. We saw a boat from Thailand. They gave us food, water and gasoline. Then they left us.

We continued to go but we didn't know where we were going. Then on the twentieth day we still hadn't reached the island. The boat floated alone on the ocean without any gasoline because we had no gasoline left and no food or water. A little kid started to cry all night because he wanted something to drink, and other people started to say they wanted to meet the Vietnamese cops because they might have a little food or water for us, but the boat was very far away from Vietnam.

We were lucky again. It started to rain. Now we had the water to drink and after two or three days we saw a Japanese's boat. They gave us food, gasoline and more water. They also gave us a map and taught us how to drive the boat. But we got lost again. Of course we didn't have enough food or water for a long time.

On day 22 we saw another boat very far away from our boat. They threw us food and water in the ocean.

Then we had to swim to get those things. We didn't know what kind of boat it was because they had already left.

On day 30 we were still praying to God. Now everyone was very sad because we didn't want to live in the boat any more. It was very dirty and we had no water to drink. We were very thirsty and we washed by the sea water. Now we didn't have any gasoline either, so we floated along in the ocean.

Then one night when all the people in the boat were sleeping, a loud noise from a very big boat woke us. They almost crashed our boat because they did not see us. We had no lights. We started to yell at them. They must have heard us because they change their direction. Later we regretted our actions. If we hadn't yelled we could have died and that would have been easier than living. Then that afternoon it started raining. We had water to drink for five or more days.

On day thirty-nine we met another Thailand boat. We were really scared because we thought they were pirates. But they weren't. They gave us food and water and pulled us near then they cut the rope. Now the motor broke so we had to row. Then we reached the place where boats get gas. They called another boat for us and drove us to the Pulau BiDong island, the refugee camp (16 year old female).

Summary

The decision to leave was made mostly by the family of the youths and with one or more of the following reasons in mind: for a better future, for freedom, for a chance at an education, to escape communism, to avoid induction into the army, to serve as a sponsor for other family members, to escape poverty and hunger, to reunite with family in the U.S., and because of being Amerasian. The context of escape by boat varied, but some common experiences were that they had to pay money, they left family behind, they faced the consequences of jail or even death if they were caught, and they faced extreme danger from natural disaster to starvation to robbing, raping, and/or murder by pirates.

Chapter 7

FINDINGS IV: WAITING IN REFUGEE CAMPS

Boat people who have survived the perilous journey from their homeland are waiting in refugee camps; waiting to have their status determined, waiting to be resettled, or waiting to go back home. They spend their time in closed centres, wondering what the future holds (UNHCR, 1990, p. 11).

The most immediate problem for refugees fleeing their homeland is to find asylum, a temporary refuge where they will be safe until they are allowed to settle permanently, either there or elsewhere. The second problem the refugees face, once they are settled in a refugee camp, is waiting to leave. This chapter will explore the experiences of the youths in this study from the time they land on the shores of a first asylum country to eventual acceptance for resettlement in a third country.

Countries of First Asylum

Because they flee by boat, and because they often lack experienced navigators, the Vietnamese are the most far flung group of Asian refugees (Feith, 1988). They have landed in Australia, Brunei, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Korea, Macau, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, and Thailand (Figure 15). Some refugees have been rescued by ships of countries even further away. Most of the youths in this study found first asylum in Thailand, Malaysia, and Hong Kong.

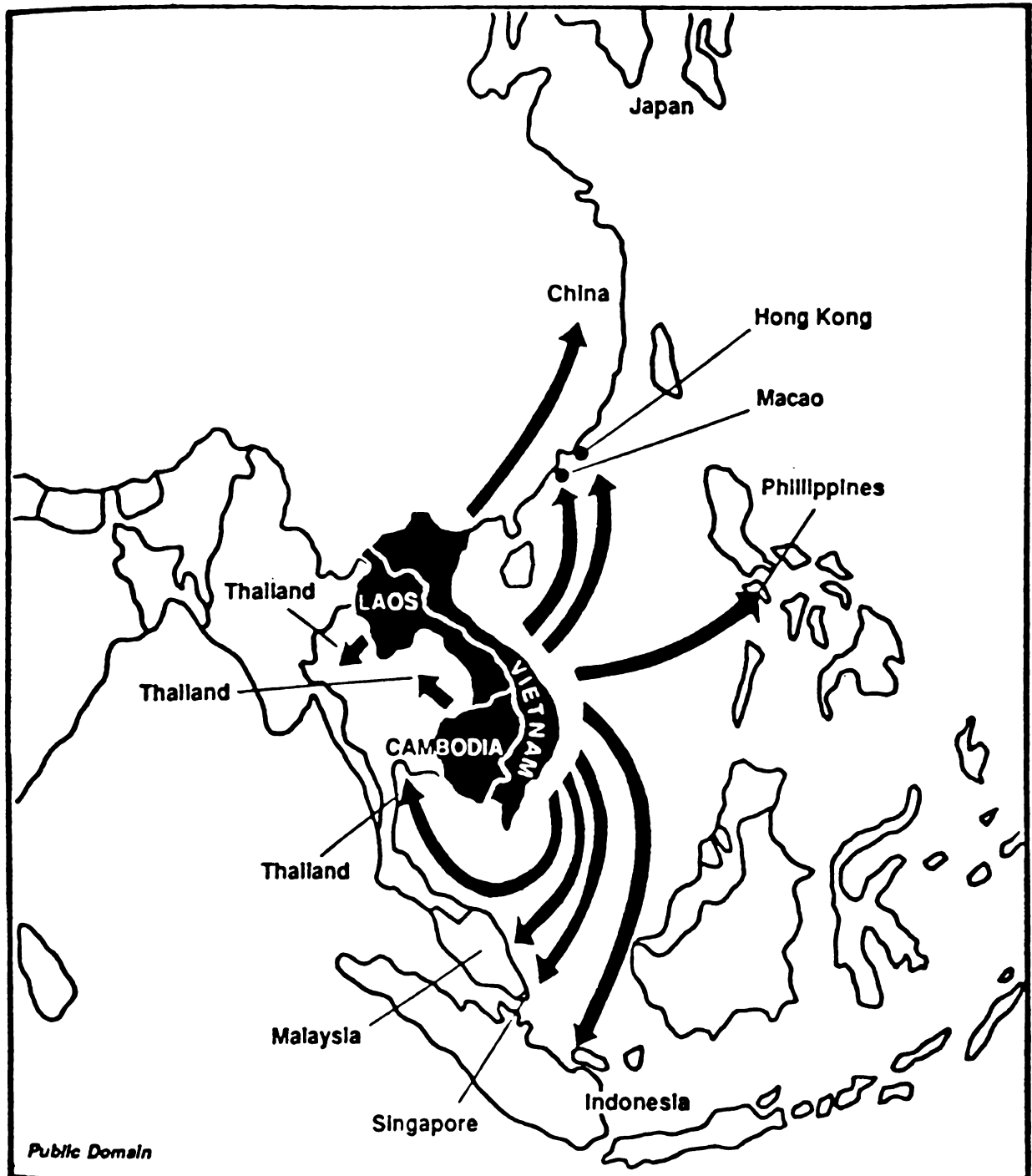


Fig. 15: The Flight from Southeast Asia

Asylum in Thailand

Forty-four percent of the youths in this study arrived in Thailand as the country of first asylum. Thailand is the closest destination for people leaving South Vietnam. All but one of the students who were in Thailand stayed at the Phanat Nikhom refugee camp. One of the youths shared his experiences after arrival in Thailand.

After five days on the ocean, we landed on a town in Thailand. We were put in a Pagoda. There we started to be homesick because that was the first time we had gone to a far away country without family. Every afternoon we usually tried to group together to talk or narrate everything about Saigon, family, and souvenir. We tried to remember what we had lost.

After eighteen days at the Pagoda, we were taken to a refuge camp which was named Phanat Nikhom. It was near Bangkok (16 year old male).

Phanat Nikhom is the most overcrowded camp in Thailand (Biagini, 1989; Feith, 1988). The camp is divided into two parts. One part was originally intended for Kampuchians. However, at present, it accommodates refugees of all ethnic groups with the exception of Vietnamese who are housed in a restricted area of the camp called section C. Section C used to be a transit center for refugees who had been interviewed for resettlement. Now, however, most of the 10,000 people there have little prospect of resettlement unless they have close relatives in third countries or are unaccompanied minors.

When refugees arrive on the shores of Thailand, they are usually bussed to the administration building at the entrance of one of the camps. It is here that the refugees

must wait while Thailand's Displaced Persons Protection Unit searches through their belongings. This is carried out before the refugees are assigned their sleeping quarters.

Their Vietnamese money is taken away, every piece of correspondence is read, wads of tissue paper are unfolded and then carefully folded up again, when all they prove to contain are locks of hair of loved ones left behind. The Vietnamese watch without rancor. Their relief at having reached a safe haven is tangible (UNHCR, 1989, p. 24).

One of the youths (15 year old male) in this study stayed at Site 2 refugee camp near the Kampuchean (Cambodian) boarder. He had escaped Vietnam by going through Kampuchea and spent two years at Site 2 refugee camp. Site 2 is by far the largest border camp (Feith, 1988). It is a consolidation of separate camps . The camp has no electricity and no wells so water must be trucked in daily.

Asylum in Malaysia

Thirty-six percent of the youths in this study arrived in Malaysia as their country of first asylum.

I escaped Vietnam and landed in Malaysia. On the first day they thought we came to capture their country, but we didn't. The next day they sent us to the camp (15 year old male).

We landed on an island. At first we thought no one lived on that island, but on the other side there were police and fishermen's houses. We stayed on that island for 2 days. Then we moved to the main land of Malaysia and stayed there for 3 days. After that the bus came and picked us up. We took a long drive to another stop and stayed there to wait for the boat to

Paulau Bidong Island. That was the Vietnamese Refugee camp. I lived there for 3 years (18 year old male).

The Pulau Bidong camp in Malaysia was opened in 1978 by the Malaysian government (Biagini, 1989; Feith, 1988). It is an uninhabited island off the east coast of Malasia. Thus, the refugees are isolated from the local population. Resettlement is fairly promising. Most are resettled in Australia, Canada, France, and the U.S.

Some of the young people spent time in the Sugei Besi camp, a transit center of about 3,000 people (Feith, 1988).

Asylum in Hong Kong

One student in this study arrived in Hong Kong as her country of first asylum. Prior to 1980, Hong Kong welcomed refugees from Vietnam who tended to be mostly ethnic Chinese (Feith, 1988; UNHCR, 1989). However, most of the recent arrivals have been ethnic Vietnamese, and this factor along with the massive numbers that have stretched the Hong Kong facilities to capacity has turned the public attitude against the Vietnamese refugees. Hong Kong's "humane deterrence" policy was established in 1982, and from then on all new arrivals were put in closed camps. These camps are surrounded by high barbed wire fences, with very cramped quarters and minimal freedom. The refugees are not allowed to work outside the camp, and work within the camps is extremely limited. They are not allowed to leave until resettlement arrangements have been made.

Conditions in the Camps

Conditions at the camps vary, though some common themes pervade the students' writings. When they were asked what they liked about the camp(s) in which they lived, 44% percent said "Nothing!" Many wrote it in large letters with exclamation point. Thirty percent said they liked school and learning English. Others mentioned they liked being safe, the food, the weather, sleeping, and skill training.

When asked what was the worst thing about the camp(s), many mentioned the conditions of the camp -- dirty, crowded, noisy, and the lack of food and water (Table 8). They also mentioned fighting, violence, drugs, and the seemingly endless waiting to leave . The following are some of their comments.

I didn't like to live with people I didn't even know who they were (16 year old female).

They drugs, and they fight and they go to the bathroom anywhere (16 year old male).

Rules like a jail -- we can't go out of the camp (18 year old male).

I didn't like how we were treated in camp (16 year old male).

The camp so boring, no good, it sucks! (15 year old male)

On the first day we lived in Pulau Bidong, we were very scared because of the mice. When we slept the mice ran around the beds. We could see the mice every where in the camp. It was also very very dirty (17 year old female).

Table 8: Negative Aspects of Camp Life (N=30)

Responses	Percent*
Noisy and Crowded	30
Lack of Water	26
Fighting/Violence	23
Dirty	23
Bad Treatment	19
Like a Jail	19
Food	19
Waiting to Leave	14
Boredom	14
Low Standard of Living	10
Drugs	10

* The total is more than 100 percent since a few students gave more than one answer.

Attitudes of host governments towards refugees vary considerably and affect camp conditions. Most Southeast Asian governments who are hosts to refugees are reluctantly so (Feith, 1988; UNHCR, 1989). Most have "humane deterrence" policies which are intended to make the camps unpleasant enough to deter refugees. Thus, the camps are crowded with virtually no privacy or security, and the refugees are treated like prisoners.

Housing

Housing is a major problem in the refugee camps because of the crowded conditions. Types of housing vary from country to country and camp to camp.

In Thailand, at the Phanat Nikhom refugee camp, housing consists of two, three, and four family barrack-style units built of asbestos sheeting, bamboo, concrete, corrugated tin, and wood (Feith, 1988; UNHCR, 1989). These units are arranged in quadrangles that accommodate between eight and sixteen families.

I lived with my mother and sister in Phanat Nikhom camp. We stayed in a big building that was divided into little apartments. We shared an apartment with another family. It was very crowded! (17 year old female)

At the Site 2 camp in Thailand, housing consists of rows upon rows of small bamboo huts (Biagini, 1989; UNHCR, 1989). The huts are small and thus offer little if any privacy for several people who must live in each one. They also offer no protection from the frequent border incidents.

Two nights prior to our visit Site 2 was shelled from Kampuchea: seven persons died and more than 30 were wounded. Bamboo huts provided no protection from mortar shells (Neuwirth, 1987, p. 1).

In Malaysia, the camp on Pulau Bidong is full to overflowing. The camp was intended to accommodate a maximum of 6,000 people. It now houses more than 13,000 (Feith, 1989). There are two types of housing in this

camp. One is extended huts or longhouses which are already bursting at the seams (UNHCR, 1989). Some sling their hammocks underneath huts which are built on stilts. In some of the long houses, the refugees sleep in shifts so that their beds are occupied 24 hours a day. The second type of housing is one room huts which house some of the families.

In Hong Kong the housing is perhaps the most critical as another student illustrates.

** I lived for two years in the Hong Kong refugee camp with my aunt. We lived in a huge three-story barrack. There were from 800 to 1,000 people on one floor. There were no walls. Curtains were used to divide space. It was full of noise and confusion (17 year old female).*

Housing for unaccompanied minors varies not only from camp to camp but also within the camps. Some of these youths are assigned to live with other families and some live with unaccompanied minors in a house or dormitory.

I lived at Pulau Bidong Malaysia. I lived there with some friends who knew me before when their family was living by my house in Vietnam. They were very kind to me and helped me a lot so I really appreciated that. While I was there I was very happy because I didn't have any unfortunate thing happen (17 year old male).

I lived in Pulau Bidong. I lived in a house with other children who didn't have families [Figure 16] (12 year old female).

Some of the unaccompanied minors who are living in dormitories are as young as five years old (UNHCR, 1989). In some of the dormitories the children sleep on ground.

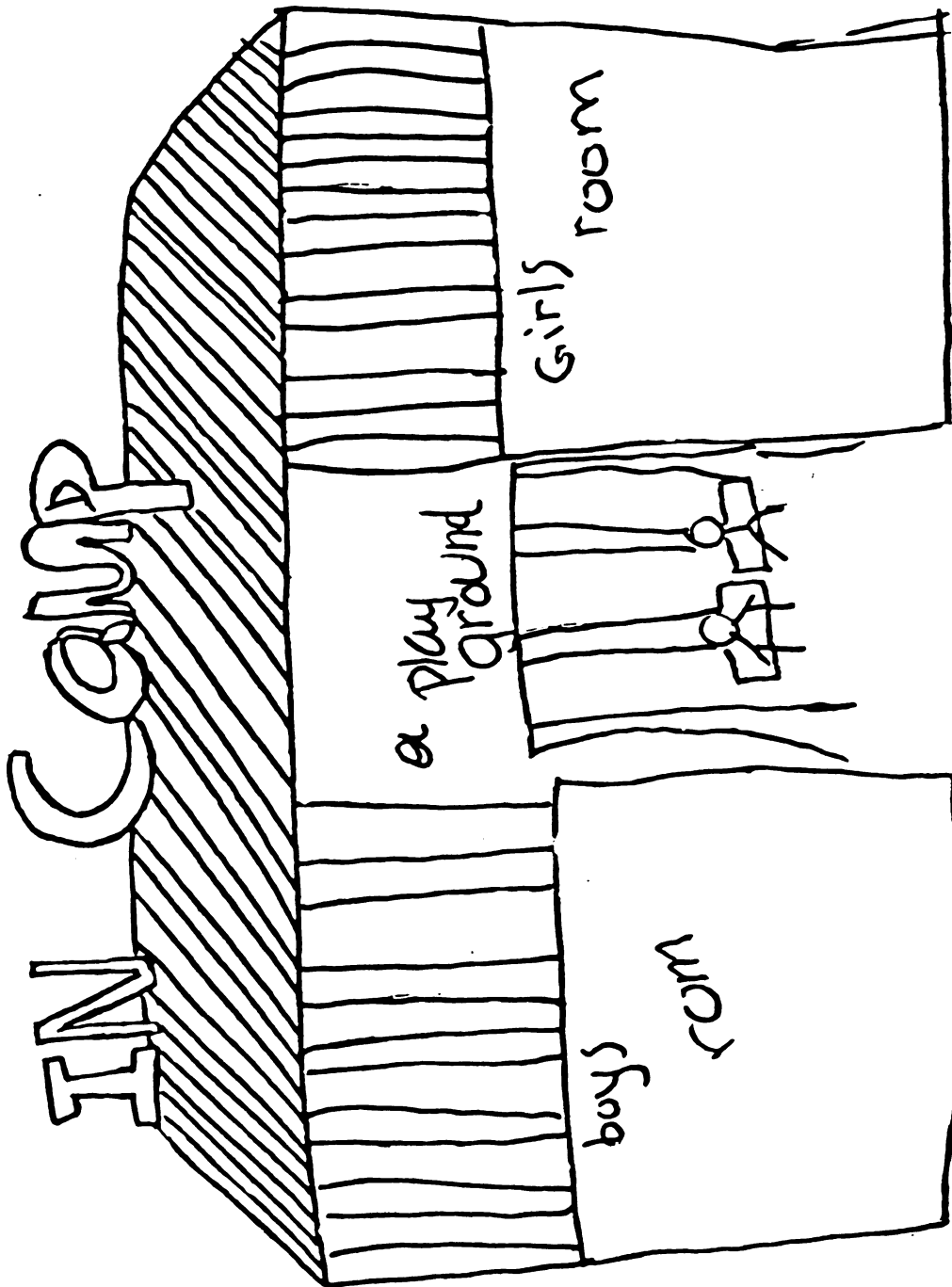


Fig. 16: House for Unaccompanied Minors

The older unaccompanied minors supervise the younger ones, cook their own meals (Figure 17), fetch water and food (Figure 18), and do their own housework.

Every day in the morning I went to study English. Classes were over at 11:30. After school I went home. Someone prepared lunch for me. And then my friends went to school in the afternoon, and I had to stay home and cook something for dinner (16 year old male).

Rations

Scarcity of drinking water is a common difficulty in refugee camps. The land allocated by a host government is usually land that no one else can use or wants, often because of its lack of water (Feith, 1988). Thus, for example, on Pulau Bidong Island, which has no natural water, water has to be brought in by boat. To Phanat Nikhom and Site 2, where there are no wells, water is brought in by truck. Enough water is usually provided for drinking and cooking, but water for washing is scarce.

We didn't have enough food or water (14 year old male).

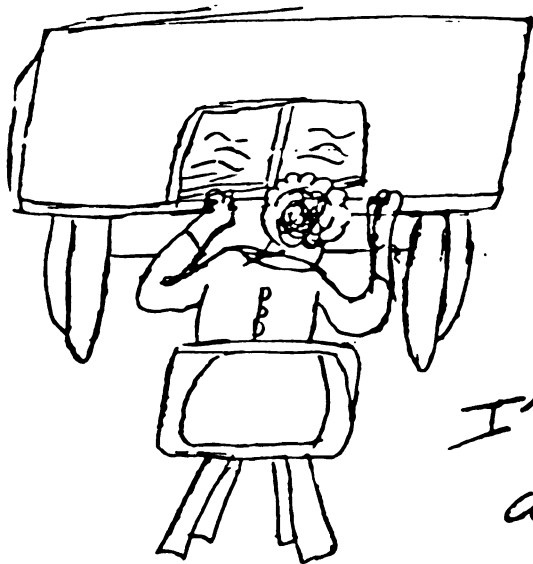
I didn't have enough food to eat (15 year old male).

Everyday we had to wake up early to get our water supply to drink or cook with (16 year old female).

Another problem with camp life is the food. The refugees are given a minimal amount of food designed as an emergency ration to temporarily sustain them (Feith, 1988). However, rations stay the same no matter what the



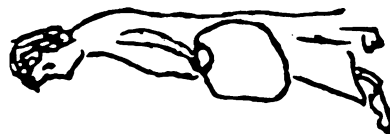
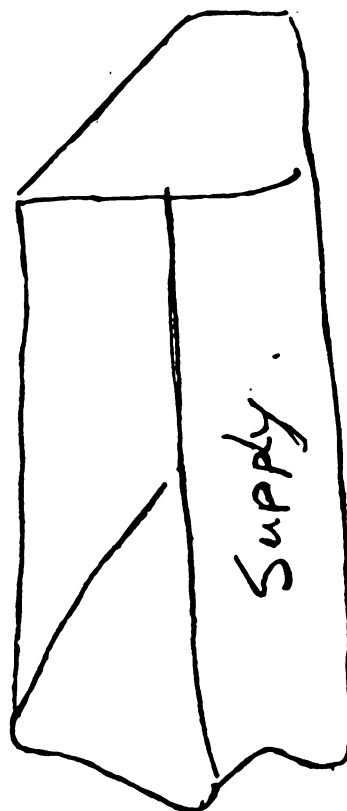
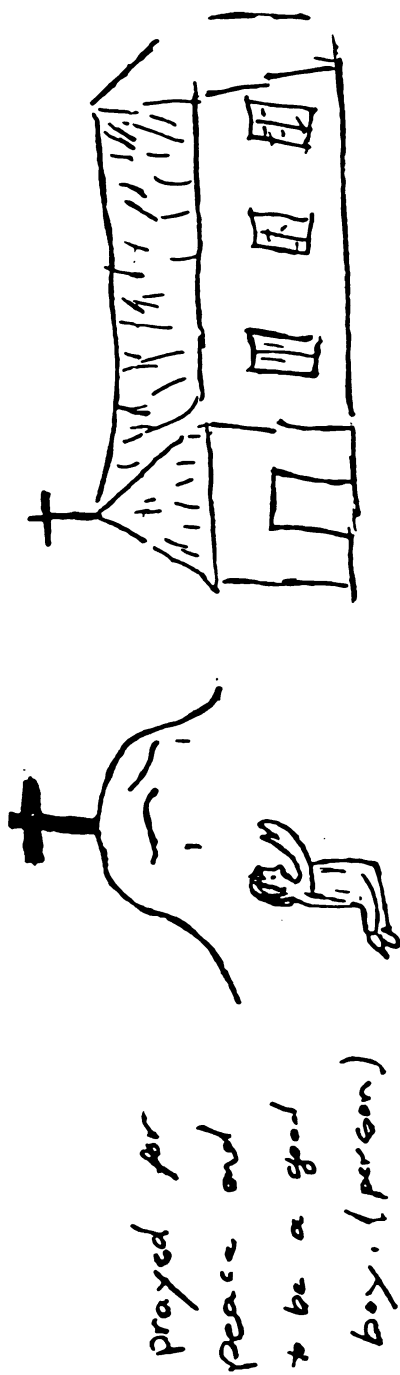
I'm cooking in the camp



I'm studying
at the table

Fig. 17: Activities of Unaccompanied Female

Living in The Camp.



go to get food.

Fig. 18: Activities of Unaccompanied Male

length of stay. Some of the students were on these meager diets for one, two, and even three years. Since there is no water available for agriculture, most refugees cannot supplement or vary their diets by growing vegetables or herbs. Without finding a way to supplement their rations, many suffer from chronic malnutrition manifested by stunted growth (Biagini, 1988; Peck et al., 1981).

Conflict, Crime and Confinement

Conflict is high in these refugee camps due to the overcrowded conditions and scarcity of resources (Biagini, 1989; Feith, 1988). Camp security is poor and rape, robbery, and gang activity are serious problems. Psychological stress can be very high due to these problems as well as due to the lack of freedom. Many of the students wrote about feeling like they were in a jail.

One student wrote about the conditions in the camp where he stayed and the effect those conditions had on him.

We couldn't get out of the camp. I started my independent life there. I had to cook for myself. There were many classes, with many levels for teaching English in the camp. But I didn't go to any class because I had to worry about too many things in my life, such as food, clothes and settlement. I didn't have enough food for a week. I had about three kilograms of rice, twenty milliliters of fish sauce, .3 kg meat for the whole week [Figure 19].

I lived on the island for 6 months then they took me to another camp. In that camp there were many laws I must to follow. On the second camp it was like being in the jail. So how could you have fun? In the camp where I lived, there were many things happened like drinking and drugs and fighting [Figure 20] (16 year old male).

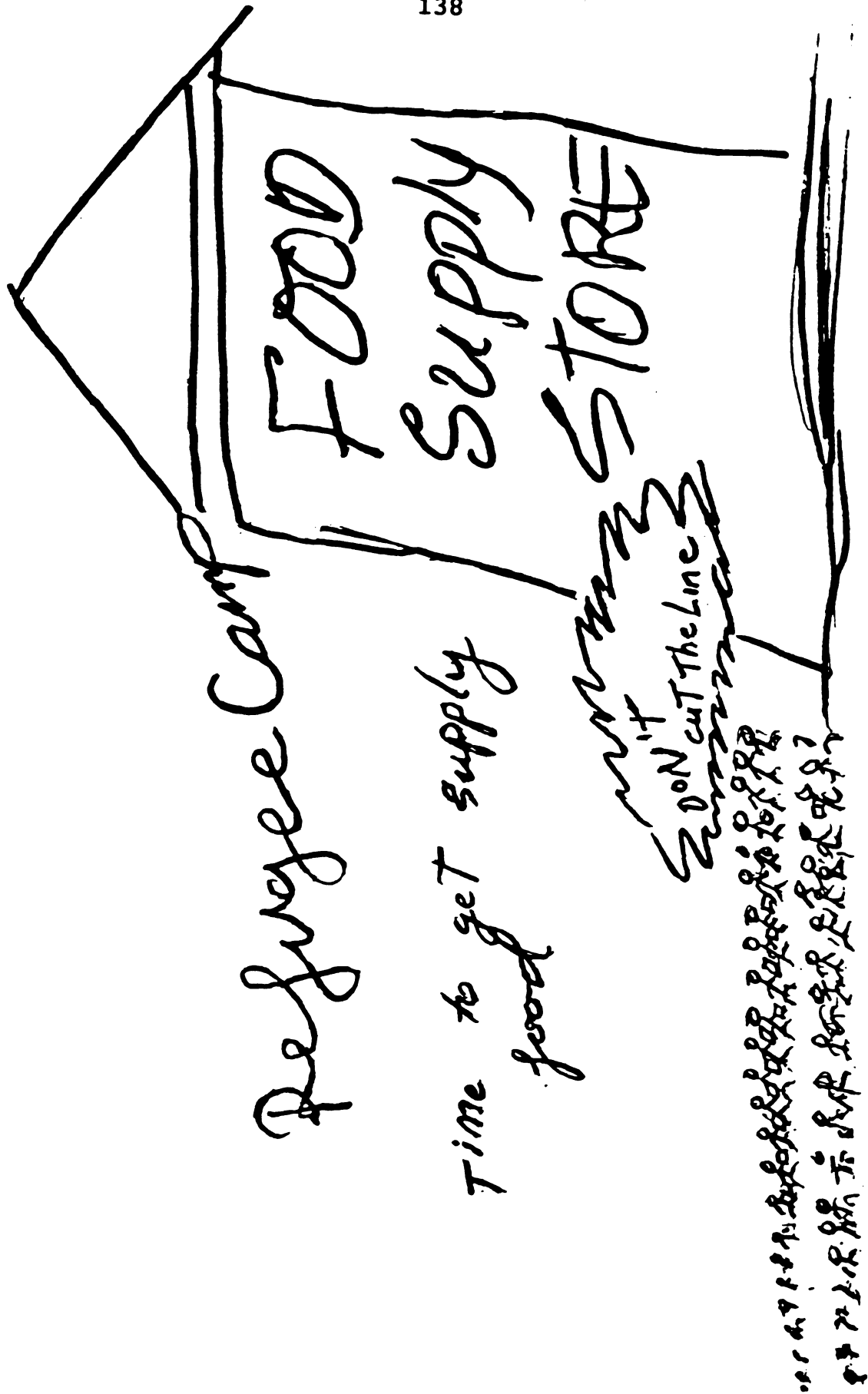


Fig. 19: Food Line In Refugee Camp

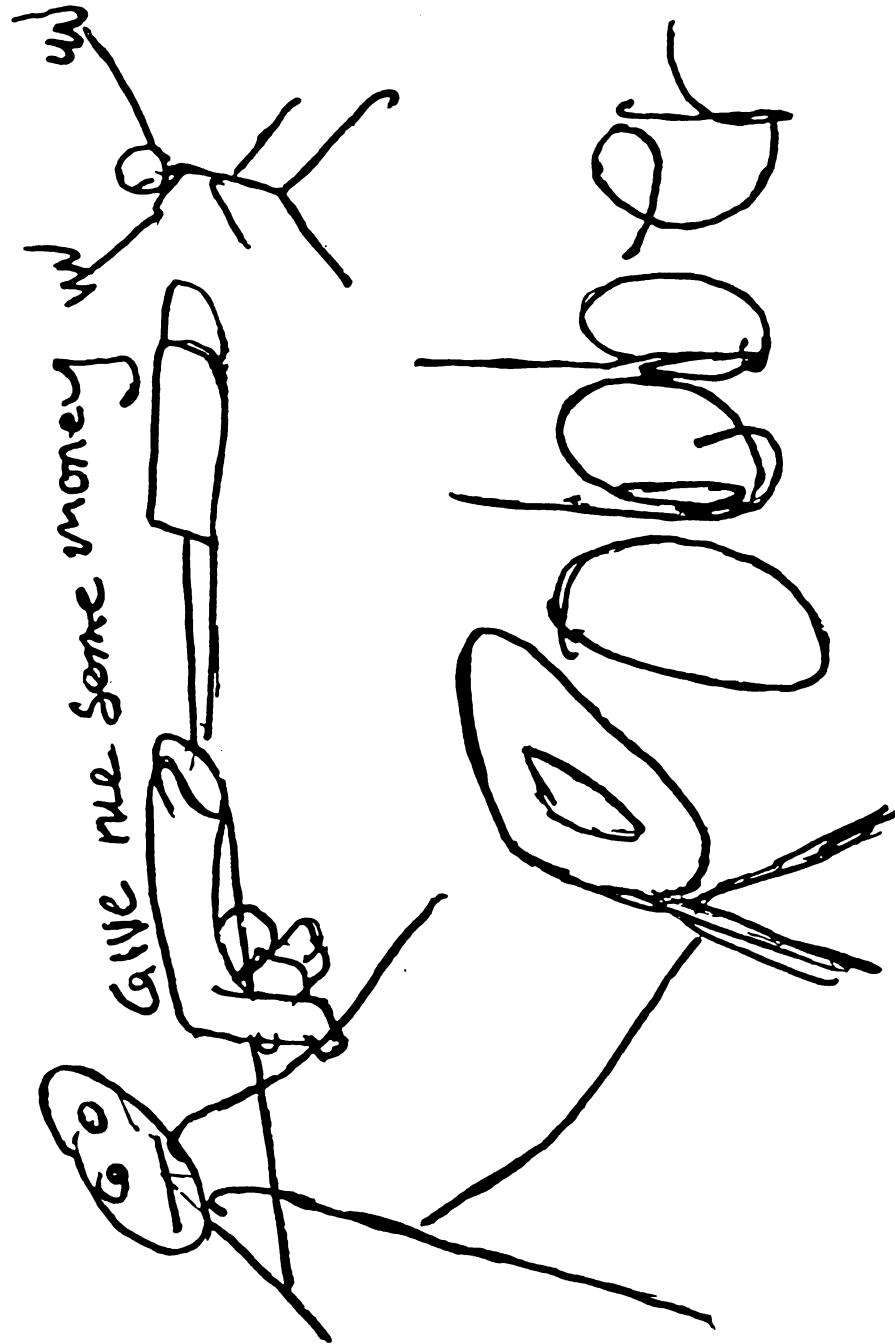


Fig. 20: Crime in Refugee Camp

Activities in the Camps

The common experience of youths in refugee camps is that there is very little for them to do to occupy their time (Biagini, 1989). Some schooling is available and a few jobs may be found though the opportunity is limited.

The students in this study had a wide range of educational experiences in the camps. Some did not attend school. Some of those who did not attend school were in the camps from one to three and one half years. One such student stated he enjoyed living in the camp because he could do what he wanted and didn't have to go to school. Others, however, took advantage of every educational opportunity given them. In the camp in Thailand, 56% went to school, 44% had no schooling in the camp. In Malaysia, 64% attended school with 36% having no schooling.

The majority of the students did not have a job in the camps. Three male students from school #1 indicated they had a job in camp. One (age 16 at the time) did construction work, another (age 10 at the time) carried water, and the third did not indicate what he did. In school #2 none of the students had a job in camp. This is in contrast with the students at school #3 in which five of the eight students indicated they had a job. One, a male (age 17 at the time) was a Thai-Vietnamese translator, two females worked in sales, one female in babysitting, and another female did sewing.

Waiting to Leave

Waiting is not easy under the best of circumstances. It is especially hard on refugees in camps. Many of the students mentioned that one of the hardest thing about living in the camp was waiting to leave. Their biggest worry was that they would be stuck there forever, especially when they would see other refugees who have been there for years.

The children and youths in the refugee camps apply to different countries for resettlement. For many it is a seemingly endless time of waiting as they worry that they will not be accepted by any country for resettlement.

I was so afraid I would never get out of the camp (16 year old male).

I was scared when I was in camp. I thought I might be stuck there forever. Some people, they are single and have been there for years and can't leave (17 year old female).

Length of Time in Camp

All the above aspects of living in a refugee camp have implications when one looks at the length of time the students spent in camp. Forty-six percent spent six months to one year in camp, and an additional 48% spent over one year, some as long as three and one-half years. Those who spent under one year in camp included most of the Amerasians in this study, unaccompanied minors who were pre-adolescent to early adolescent, and a family with younger children.

Those who spent over one year were mostly from Phanat Nikhom, Thailand. One student (female, age 14 to 16 at the time) spent 2 years in Hong Kong. Another student (male, age 14 to 16 at the time) spent three years in Pulau Bidong, Malaysia. He was detained in the camp as a form of punishment for falsifying his name and age. While many do this, this student actually used his own name and age, not knowing that his father and other brothers and sisters, who had passed through a few years earlier, had taken the names and ages of younger siblings since younger children are usually processed through faster. He was unaware that his name had been used by one of his brothers, so when he gave his own name and age, it was already listed as being someone else.

Camp Transfers

Some students were transferred to several camps before coming to the United States. Two students spent time in three different camps before being allowed to come to the U.S. One of them wrote the following:

We came to Malaysia. After one day there, they sent us to the Pulau Bidong Island. I lived there for about 6 months. After that they sent me to the Sungei Besi camp. I lived there for about 3 months. After that they sent me to the Philippines. I stayed there for 8 months (15 year old male).

After a year we moved to another camp. The name of that camp was Sugei Besi. The Sungei Besi camp looked better than Bidong. We could use the water supply anytime we wanted. We had to live there for about five months. Then we moved to the Philippines. We had to study there for six months. Then we came to America (16 year old female).

Unaccompanied Minors

According to the UNHCR (1989) many of the unaccompanied minors living in refugee camps, in conditions ranging from difficult to dangerous, are there because their parents chose to send them with a view to their own eventual resettlement.

Such cases are well known among refugee workers, having become a tragically common strategy used by parents in Vietnam to gain access to a resettlement country. The horrific realities of loss of life at sea, by natural forces or violent pirate attacks and the deteriorating conditions of camp life, have had no apparent impact on the numbers of unaccompanied minors being put on boats by their parents. The fact that these children can now no longer provide an easy route to resettlement has yet to filter through . . . In consequence, it is likely that many children will have to stay in camps and detention centres much longer than any of us would want (UNHCR, 1989, p. 38).

International Environment

One factor impacting the students and their families while waiting in the camps are the policies of not only countries of first asylum but also of receiving nations. Some apply to several countries and wait to be interviewed for possible acceptance by one of them.

In 1979, at the international conference on Indochinese refugees, an agreement was drawn up. The agreement stated that the ASEAN nations would provide asylum to all "boat people" on the condition that other nations bear the expense, would subsequently resettle the refugees, and that the ASEAN nations would not be left

with a residue of refugees (Feith, 1988). This agreement has not been fully honored. Nearly 17 percent of the "boat people" have been in refugee camps longer than four years, some for as long as ten years (Biagini, 1989).

In response to the perceived renegeing by resettlement nations, several of the ASEAN nations have responded with humane deterrence policies (Feith, 1988; UNHCR, 1989). For example, in 1988 Thai authorities turned around boats carrying more than 1,000 Vietnamese refugees and refused to allow them to land in Thailand. That same year, the Malaysian government announced that it too would begin stopping refugees from landing. Through these policies, the governments in Southeast Asia and Hong Kong are revealing their questioning regarding what responsibility they have to provide asylum when the Western governments are not honoring the agreement that they resettle *all* refugees.

Acceptance for Resettlement

We were put in the camp and we waited there until the American delegation came to interview us. If I answered everything right then they would allow me to go to America. I had to be under eighteen. They sent me to the Philippines to study there for six months. After I graduated, I had to wait on a list to go to America (15 year old male).

Philippine Refugee Processing Center

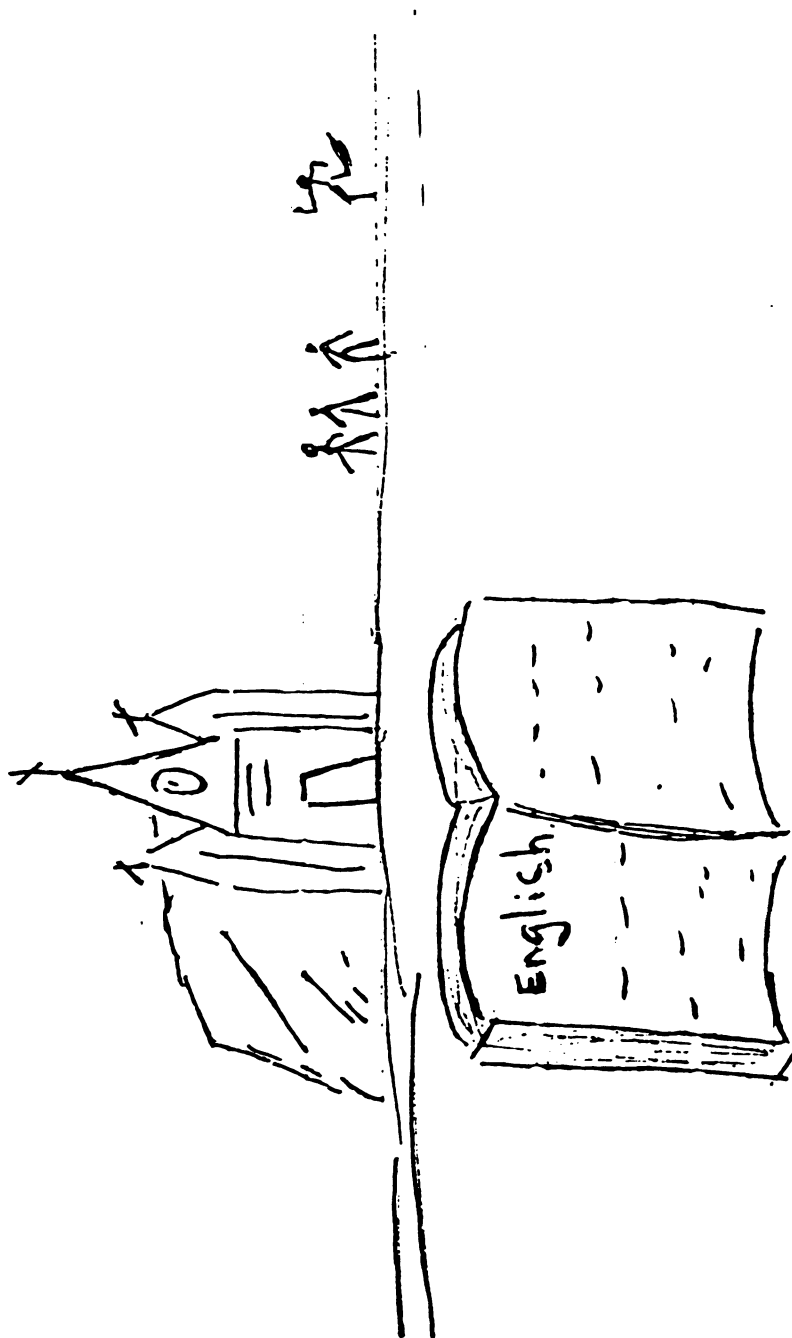
The students in this study who arrived in the Philippines did so directly under the Orderly Departure Program/Homecoming Act for Amerasians or were transferred

there from other first asylum countries after being accepted for resettlement. They stayed in the Philippine Refugee Processing Center (PRPC) at Bataan.

Over one third of all the refugees in the PRPC found first asylum in the Philippines, one third are transferred there from other places of first asylum on the way to other resettlement nations, and under one third arrive under the Orderly Departure Program (ODP) or Homecoming Act (Biagini, 1989). The PRPC is predominantly funded by the U.S., and most refugees in this center go to the U.S. The refugees are sent there in order to attend language training and cultural orientation courses before traveling to their country of resettlement.

The best thing about the camp in Bataan was school. I liked learning English and learning about American life [Figure 21] (16 year old male).

The students who were in the Philippines indicated that the PRPC was a pleasant experience in contrast to their experiences in the refugee camps. Many stated that what they liked best was going to school and learning English. They also liked the better conditions such as better housing, sufficient food and water, and better security. Some also stated that they enjoyed the variety of recreational activities. Favorite pastimes included going to the beach and swimming and sports (Figure 22).



In camp

Fig. 21: Activities in the PRPC

in a camp.

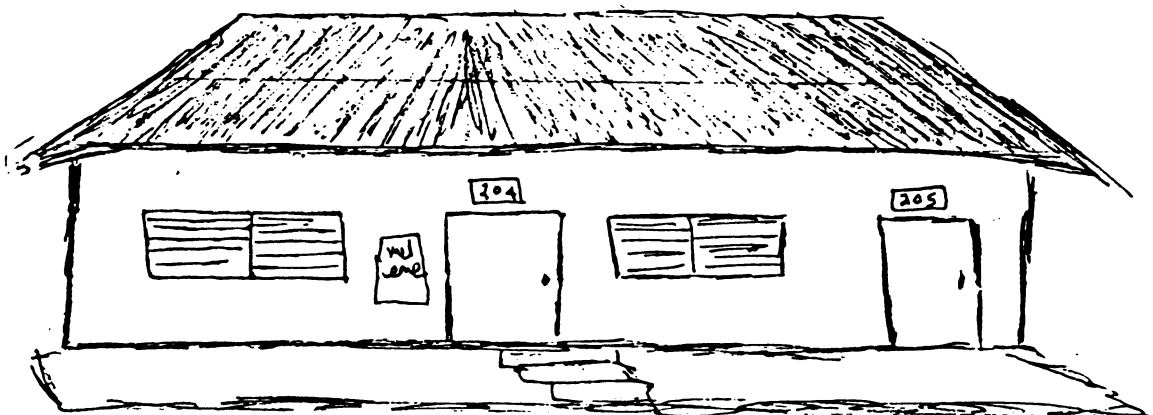
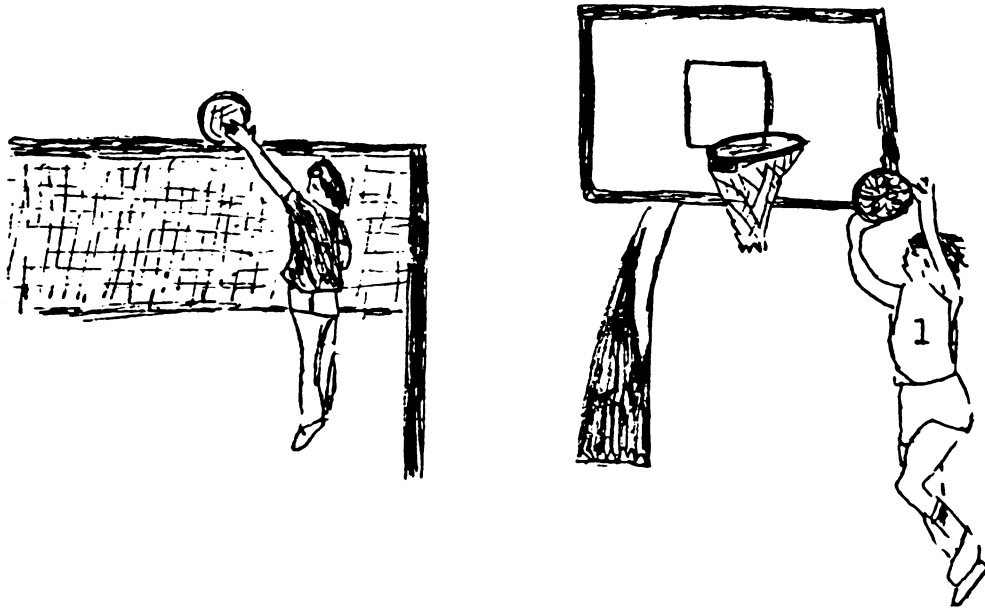


Fig. 22: Living in the PRPC

Once the students were accepted for resettlement in the United States, they began thinking about what their new life would be like. Table 9 shows their expectations of life in the United States. The most common expectations were that life would be rich and comfortable. A life of freedom and fun were also common answers. One student stated that he expected a "honey land." His answer touches on the commonality in most of their answers -- that of expecting some sort of utopia.

Table 9: Expectations of Life in the United States (N=36)

Responses	Percent*
Rich	28
Easier Life/Better Life/Comfortable Life	28
Freedom/Life That's Free	25
Fun	14
Have Chance to go to School/Good Schools	8
No More Hunger	5
Big and Beautiful	5
More Chance to be Successful	5
Full of Criminals and Crimes Everyday	2
A Honey Land	2

* The total is more than 100 percent since a few students gave more than one answer.

When I heard I was coming to the U.S., I was very surprise because I knew the U.S. is a very good country so every immigrants want to come. I felt when I was living in my country and in the camp, my life was like a jail or slavery. But in the U.S. I knew I would have freedom and liberty (17 year old male).

Leaving Camp

The students shared a variety of feelings about leaving camp. Some were excited, others had anxious and mixed feelings. One student stated he was sad because he was leaving friends with whom he had spent the last three years.

I was in Thailand for a few years in the camp. I waited three years to come over to the U.S.A. The day I left the Thailand refugee camp I felt very sad because I wouldn't see my friends there again (16 year old male).

One student shared his experience and feelings in depth in the following writing.

I lived on a small island which was named Pulau Bidong Refugee Camp of Malaysia. While I lived there, I only studied English and waited for the delegation to interview me. After a year the U.S. Delegation allowed me to move to Sungei Besi Refugee Camp. I lived there for a few months then I was accepted by the U.S. delegation in December 1986.

Suddenly on March 20th, 1987, I saw my name on the list for leaving on March 25th, 1987. When the time came, I couldn't sleep well because I wondered how I was going to live and what I was going to be in the United States. I really worried all about those things because I was still a lonely kid and I didn't have any relative in the United States.

In the early morning on March 25th, 1987, the officers called me to leave the Sungei Besi at 5:00 AM. Before I left, I saw many Vietnamese refugees who were waiting for me. They really wanted to take me out the gate and they said very nice things to me. During that time I was very sorry for them because

they didn't know when they would go to the third country and I was luckier than those people who were still living in the refugee camp. However, I was sad and crying for them. At this time, I thought I wouldn't see them again, so I only knew to say, "Good Luck" and "Good Bye" (17 year old male).

Summary

Most of the students in this study spent time in refugee camps in Malaysia, Thailand and Hong Kong. They lived in conditions ranging from difficult to dangerous. The time spent in camps ranged from one month to three and one-half years. Some took advantage of opportunities to go to school and learn English. Others were too preoccupied with surviving/subsisting to go school. Still others simply did not want to go to school and spent their time unsupervised.

Many stated that one of the most difficult aspects of living in the camps was waiting to get out. Many were afraid they would not be accepted for resettlement and would never get out of the camp. When they were accepted to the U.S., most had high and unrealistic expectations of life in the U.S. which they imagined as a utopia where life would be rich, free, and fun.

Chapter 8

FINDINGS V: EAST MEETS WEST

When we first came to the United States we didn't know how to speak English. All we could do is to do all different kinds of hand signs and do some drawing to make others understand what we say. When I first got off at Michigan airport, I didn't understand why these people's skin color and hair colors were different. I thought, "We will be killed by these people!" (18 year old female).

The impact of uprooting and resettling in a foreign culture and society takes a tremendous amount of energy and coping/adaptational skills. The students in this study experienced resettlement in similar ways as well as in very unique and individualistic ways depending on their background experiences and personal strengths and styles. This chapter will explore the changes and stressors they experience in the U.S.A. and how they are coping with those.

Changes in Cultural Environment

Culture is rational within its own context (Asia Society, 1979, p. 154).

One of the first reactions of these young people to the United States was various degrees of culture shock, as the student in the above quote so poignantly illustrates. Upon arriving in the U.S., the refugee youths were faced with the loss of all the familiar cues and symbols of socio-cultural interactions, such as gestures, facial expressions, words, customs, and norms which they had

acquired in the course of growing up in Vietnam. It is a loss of the "thousand and one ways in which one orients oneself to the situation of daily life" (Oberg, 1966, p. 43). For these students culture shock was manifested as feelings of frustration and/or fear.

* I'd like to tell you something about my new life in America. Coming to America was a fortunate thing for me. Living in America is a wonderful country. I like it alot. But I still have many problems that I wish you and others understood. The very first problem I had was culture shock. Vietnamese and Americans are almost totally different with different lifestyles. Many times I got confused and misjudged and misunderstood people. At school I have problems with communicating (17 year old male).

* Living in America was strange and different for me at first. I am getting better and used to it. I try real hard to adapt to a new life in this country (18 year old female).

When the plane landed in the U.S., somebody said I shouldn't go outside. If I did, someone would kidnap me and kill me. I was scared. (15 year old male).

When we came here, I was so scared. But I'm getting better and better (16 year old female).

Following the initial cultural shock, these students began experiencing socio-cultural stress as they attempted to interact with their new environment and its people. Stress arose from cultural discrepancies, misunderstandings, or clashes, particularly over the subtleties of meanings.

Nonverbal Communication

A common area for misunderstandings occurred in the realm of nonverbal communication. Several types of

nonverbals were noted to be especially troublesome during interactions between the two cultures. These are chronemics, oculesics, haptics, and kinesics.

Chronemics is the timing of verbal exchanges during conversation (Schnapper, 1979). Southeast Asians time their exchanges to leave silence between each statement. Americans tend to expect their partners to respond immediately to their statements and find silence unsettling. The Americans may take the silence to mean the Vietnamese did not understand, are shy, inattentive, bored, or nervous.

Misunderstanding between Americans and Vietnamese have been observed over the use of silence. For example, today one of the American teachers was trying to hold a conversation with a Vietnamese paraprofessional. The teacher would jump in quickly when the Vietnamese paraprofessional did not respond quickly to statements or questions. The teacher tended to repeat the question/statement, rephrase say it louder, and/or say it slower. Similar incidents have occurred on other occasions with some of the other American teachers and staff when conversing with Vietnamese paraprofessionals, students, or parents (Field notes, February 26, 1990).

Oculesics is the eye-to-eye contact or avoidance (Schnapper, 1979). American teachers invariably try to make the Vietnamese students look them directly in the eye. Americans tend to be dependent on eye contact as a sign of listening behavior and do not feel that there is human contact without eye contact. To Americans, avoidance of eye contact may carry the meaning of insecurity or untrustworthiness. Most of the Vietnamese students, however, were taught not to look directly into the eye of

the other person because this exemplifies disrespect toward that person, particularly an older person or a person considered to have authority. Instead, they may look downward and only intermittently glance upward.

Haptics is the tactile form of communication (Schnapper, 1979). Some misunderstanding over touch may occur when teachers communicate with their Vietnamese students by a pat on the head. While this is culturally appropriate in the U.S., to the Vietnamese student this form of tactile communication is likely to be inappropriate. In Vietnam one does not touch another person's head because it represents disrespect for the spirits of their ancestors (Weroha, 1989)

Misunderstandings also occur over public touching between genders. The Vietnamese are shocked by open displays of affection. Even common greetings can be offensive. The typical American handshake is appropriate between two males and between two females, but if an American male reaches out and shakes the hand of a female in greeting, cultural tension/misunderstanding may result.

Another potential for cultural misunderstanding regarding haptics is the behavior of holding hands. It is not unusual to see Vietnamese students of the same gender, particularly females, holding hands for extended periods of time.

The females (ages 17 and 18) at school #3 are frequently observed holding hands. When standing and talking with a teacher two or three of them will be

holding hands. When walking down the hall in groups of two or three, they also hold hands. Today when the researcher was walking down the hall, one of the female students came along side, slipped her hand into the researcher's and walked back to the classroom in this manner (Field notes, January 4, 1990).

Misunderstandings can occur over another form of haptics.

This morning one of the male Vietnamese students patted the buttocks of an Afro-American male (a custodian) who had his back to him in the student lounge. The American erupted in anger, stormed up to the front desk and irately told what the student had done. He then called the Executive Director to file a complaint. Following this complaint and misunderstanding, the supervisor and teacher talked with this students and educated him on the meaning this gesture can have to Americans. He was told not to do it again.

The researcher asked the Vietnamese paraprofessional about this behavior, sharing that, prior to this incident, a couple of the males at school #3 had been observed patting the buttocks of Vietnamese male acquaintances as a form of greeting or salutation. The Vietnamese paraprofessional stated that while this is not appropriate in mainstream Vietnamese society, it is apparently appropriate sub-cultural behavior among certain groups (Field notes, December 20, 1989).

Kinesics is the movement of the body, such as hand gestures and facial expressions. Facial expressions, particularly the "Vietnamese smile," is typically open to cultural misunderstandings since it may exemplify happiness or may mask emotional anguish or hostility.

Many foreign teachers in Vietnam have been irritated and frustrated when Vietnamese students smile in what appears to be the wrong time and place. They cannot understand how the students can smile when reprimanded, when not understanding the lessons being explained, and especially when they should have given an answer to the question instead of sitting still and smiling quietly. Smiling at all times

and places is a common characteristic of Vietnamese. They will smile as a silent friendly gesture, to please their superiors, or as a polite screen to hide confusion, ignorance, bitterness, disappointment, shyness, and even anger. There are no guidelines to tell foreigners what meaning each smile represents in each situation (Vietnamese Paraprofessional).

Using smiling as a mask is the result of the Vietnamese value of self-control. In traditional Vietnamese society, open expression of emotions is considered in bad taste except among very close relatives or friends. "To avoid confrontation or disrespect, disagreement, frustration, or even anger are usually expressed in an indirect manner by inference, silence, or a reluctant smile" (Khoa & Van Deusen, 1981, p. 49).

The majority of the students in this study did seem to have the tendency to display a reservation in openly expressing emotions and to utilize "the Vietnamese smile." The ESL teachers in this study seemed to be very aware of this aspect of the culture.

A male student (age 16) entered the ESL classroom where the teacher was grading papers. He stood at the door smiling.

T: (looks up) May I help you?

S: Do you have my reading paper? (smiling but voice trembling)

T: I do, but I didn't correct it yet?

S: Oh (stands there smiling; starts to say something about the bilingual tutor when the tutor enters the room).

The tutor proceeds to recount that this student had been caught going through the teachers desk. The student stood there smiling, but when the tutor left, he broke down and cried. He said he had been looking for his reading paper but the tutor accused him of wrongdoing, and when he walked away and picked up a book off the shelf, the tutor humiliated him in front

of the class by saying he didn't know enough English to read that book. He said he was angry at the teacher for humiliating him (Field notes, January 17, 1990).

At break a male student went up to the teacher with a big smile on his face.

T: (looks up at him) May I help you?

S: I want to get out on Independent living.

T: Why do you want to do that?

S: (continues smiling) I don't want to be in foster care anymore.

T: Then you're not happy?

S: Yeh, I'm happy. I just want to get out. I'm old enough.

T: What's the real problem.

S: (loses smile, looks sober) Our foster mother gets real angry. She's always hollering at me. Makes me not happy. She works too hard, I think. I can't study when she's angry.

T: (Teacher suggests alternatives, such as going to the library to study rather than spending all the time at home.

The student leaves, agreeing to think it over more (Field notes, February 6, 1990).

A female student came to class with a big smile on her face and continued smiling excessively compared to her usual patterns of expression. The teacher noted that though she was smiling her eyes seemed "sad and hollow." The student, at the end of class wrote a note to the teacher saying that she came to class very sad that day (Field notes, March 1, 1990).

Health Beliefs and Treatment

Misunderstandings have also occurred over health treatments and health beliefs, which had the potential of grave consequences, as the following incident illustrates.

A male Vietnamese student (age 15) came to school with bruises on his forehead, face and neck. One of the teachers suspected abuse and consulted with the counselor. Since language was a problem, one of the bilingual paraprofessionals was asked to talk with the student and find out how it happened. After talking with the student the paraprofessional stated that the boy's uncle had administered a health treatment called coining because the boy had had a headache (February 13, 1990).

Coining, cupping, or "scratching the wind" involves a therapeutic massage in which a mentholated ointment or wax is applied to the sore areas, primarily on the forehead, around the neck, or over the shoulders and back of the patient in cases of general discomfort (Biagini, 1989). With the edge of a coin or a spoon or a piece of broken glass, the skin is scratched until dark spots that look like bruises can be seen. Sometimes just pinching the skin will be enough. The sicker the patient, the darker the spots will be. It is believed to provide temporary relief for colds, fever, vomiting, upset stomach, muscle pain, general discomfort, shock, fainting. This practice is based on the belief that "bad wind" or unhealthy air currents get caught inside the body causing illness. Scratching the medicated area lets the "bad winds" out of the body and restores health.

Cultural Values

The differences in cultural values of the Vietnamese culture and the mainstream U.S. culture have been points of clash, often with confusion on both sides since values may be subconscious and/or assumed. Based on observations, clashes were noted over values of honesty versus "saving face," independence versus interdependence, openness versus reservedness, freedom of choice versus authoritarian/hierarchical control.

One of the students in this study seemed to indicate a



better fit with the U.S. values of independence vs. the Vietnamese values of interdependence. In answer to the question, "What do you like best about the United States?" he answered the following:

Everything depends on you. You don't have to depend on everybody else (16 year old male).

Home and Family Environment

Another area of change the students experience is in their home and family. The type and degree of change varied from student to student.

Family Composition

Eleven percent of the students live in two-parent households. Only one of the families came over together. The other two were reunited with the fathers who had arrived in the U.S. previously and served as sponsors for the rest of the family. In one such family there are 12 people living at home. All, except the two youngest children, work in a factory or restaurant to contribute to the family income. The family had 18 members in Vietnam, and came over individually or in small groups until all, with the exception of grandparents, were gradually reunited over a period of seven years. One daughter who had made the journey out of Vietnam and to the U.S. alone, was hit by a train and killed one week after arriving in the U.S. The family is still in mourning over this daughter as revealed in the students' writings and behavior.

Twenty-eight percent of the students in this study live in single parent homes headed by mothers.

I've been in the U.S. three years. My family lived together in Vietnam, but in the U.S. only my mom and me live together (17 year old female).

Thirteen percent are living with relatives, such as a cousin, aunt, uncle, or sibling, who either came over with them or had arrived in the U.S. earlier.

Forty-seven percent of the students live in foster care. All these live with Vietnamese families except for two Amerasian males who live with American families (Chapter 9). A few students wrote about living in foster homes. They express differences in their experiences and in their feelings.

Right now I'm living with foster parents. I feel very happy living with them, because they always give me good advice and they take care of me very well. I'm a foster child until I reach my nineteenth birthday (17 year old male).

I want to move out of my foster home. I don't like my foster mother. She yells at me all the time. I think she works too hard and is tired. I just don't feel comfortable living there (16 year old male).

In VN I was living with my family. There were 9 people living together. They all loved me better than I'm living with my foster parents here (15 year old male).

One ethnic Vietnamese student (age 16) had asked to be placed in an American foster home. In the midst of pressing for this request, he became very anxious and, for a period of several weeks, came in daily to the ESL

classroom with questions for his ESL teacher regarding how American families function. The following is an excerpt of one of those conversations. It seems to reveal the Vietnamese cultural expectation of clear social rules and a definite "right" way of doing things.

S: What rules do you have in your house for your son?

T: (Teacher shares some of their family rules)

S: When you get up in morning what do you do first thing? Do you eat breakfast?

T: Sometimes. We usually get our own breakfasts.

S: When you get up in morning, what do you say first thing?

T: Well, we say "Good Morning".

S: Do I say good morning first or do other person say it first?

T: It doesn't matter.

S: What other rules do American families have?

T: Well that depends on each family. Each family has its own way of doing things. Each family is different.

S: (Looks surprised) Then how can I know what to do?! (anxious tone in his voice) What if I make a mistake?!

T: Well, the best thing to do if you're not sure is to ask (Field notes, January 17, 1990).

When the participating students were asked what makes them sad, the top answer was missing their families (Table 10). Most who gave this answer were unaccompanied minors/foster children. In their writings, many of these youths had the common themes of loneliness, homesickness, and, in

TABLE 10: What Makes Students Sad (N=36)

Responses	Percent
Family far away from me/Missing parents	31
Getting bad grades/Failing a test	22
Not getting good grades	5
When I get bad grade and someone yells at me	5
School/The students in school	5
Love/Girlfriend turn me down	5
Death/Accidents kill	5
If I'm not successful	5
I can't learn English good	5
Not getting a letter from my family	2
Getting a letter with bad news from my family	2
Loneliness	2
No mother	2
No money	2
My family still treating me same as in VN	2

some cases, a yearning to go home, particularly for those who felt coerced/forced into leaving Vietnam.

I surprise with the new life in the U.S. after I arrive here. In the U.S. I really have freedom and liberty. Now that I am in the U.S. Sometimes I'm disappointed that I came here because I don't see my

parent or my brothers, sisters every day. But I hope in sometimes soon I will be see them. On the other hand I'm not disappointed with everything I have (16 year old male).

I am living and studying in the greatest nation in the world. I can have everything but the love from my family (14 year old male).

I wish my foster parents understood about me because I'm a lonely child so I need love from adult person who is like my parent. When I left my family in VN there're many problems happen to me. I think about my family all the time. Loneliness is a life no one can live. I have everything my mind wants, freedom, but I cannot forget my family. Sometime I dream that I meet my family but when I open my eyes I see nothing (16 year old male).

Another issue for the young people in foster care is the temporary nature of the family, a stark contrast to the typical interdependent Vietnamese families. When these young people turn 18 or 19, they are totally on their own. Many worry about what will happen when they must leave their foster home and live on their own in this foreign society.

I think English language is very important to me. English is use everywhere in the United States. If I get through high school possibly I don't learn English well. I think that will be a big problem to me because I think when I'm 18 I must go out to live by myself. I don't know what can I do when I 18 years old (17 year old male)

Not all unaccompanied minors can handle foster care placement. Two male students (ages 17 and 18) at schools #2 and #3 have been put on independent living because of being unable to handle foster care. One of the students has been in five different placements in eight months.

Independent living is a controlled placement for 17 and 18 year old wards of the court who live on their own under the supervision of a caseworker. They receive income for living expenses from the government through the foster care agency. Independent living is a pre-step to being totally emancipated from the court-placed jurisdiction.

As a result of knowing these two students, two other students at school #2 have decided they would like more "freedom." They are now in the process of being placed on independent living and plan to live together.

Family Expectations

Stress comes from many sides for these young people, including family, both in the U.S. and in Vietnam. When asked what their family in the U.S. expected of them, the three top answers revolved around school: to get good grades/get all "A's" (28%), to work hard in school (22%), to go to school/become more educated (19%) (Table 11). There is a tendency of the Vietnamese to think that school failure is simply due to a lack of effort (Khoa and Van Deusen, 1981). This belief is based in Confucian teaching. The high expectations seem to be stressful on the students in this study. Two students made the following comments:

I wish my parents could understand that it is hard to get a good grade in every class I take (16 year old female).

I wish my family would understood in skills of reading English is hard for me (16 year old male).

TABLE 11: Expectations of Family in U.S. (N=32)

Responses	Percent*
Be a Good Student/Get Good Grades/Get all "A's"	28
Work Hard in School/Study Hard	22
Go to School/Become More Educated	19
Get a Good Job	13
Be a Good Person/Be a Good Boy in Family	10
Graduate From College	6
I Don't Know/Mother Did Not Give Me a Signal	6
Live a Good Life	3
To Speak Vietnamese	3

* Total is more than 100 percent since a few students gave more than one answer.

In contrast, it seems that these young people perceive that family in Vietnam have a different set of expectations for them. The emphasis is on making money in order to help the family financially or to sponsor them (Table 12).

During the past two years I have kept writing letters and sending money to my family in Vietnam (16 year old male).

I have a job. I make money so I can send to my family to help them (17 year old male).

TABLE 12: Expectations by Family in Vietnam (N=32)

Responses	Percent*
Send Money Back/Help Them	31
Help Them Come to U.S.	22
Have a Good Job	13
To Study Hard/Work Hard	13
To Be Successful	9
Get All "A's"/Be a Good Student	6
Live a Good Life/Have a Better Life	6
To Think of Them a Lot	6
To Become a Doctor	3
Go to College	3
Go to School Everyday	3

* Total is more than 100 percent since a few students gave more than one answer.

Home Language

Seventy-two percent of the students indicated that at home they only speak Vietnamese with family and friends. Nineteen percent stated that they speak some English at home. One student speaks Vietnamese and Chinese at home, another speaks only Chinese, and a third student, who is in an American foster home, speaks only English at home. One student shares the following:

Now I live with my mother. I speak Vietnamese in my home because my mother doesn't know how to speak English. But I speak English when I am in school, and Vietnamese too, when I am in the bilingual class with my friends. I seldom read any books and newspaper. But if I feel bored I read in English because I don't know how to read Vietnamese words (15 year old male).

Changes in the Linguistic Environment

Because of my lack of ability to speak English, I don't know what I am going to be in the future (17 year old male).

While language is a part of the socio-cultural environment, it is such an important aspect of these students' current situations that it is necessary to examine it separately as an environment within its own right.

Preoccupation over the loss of linguistic competencies pervades the students writings and answers on the surveys. Their most frequent response to the question, "What is the worst thing about living in the U.S.?" was not being able to understand when people talk and not being able to communicate in English (Table 13).

At first living in America was very hard for me because I just knew just a little English to talk with other people (16 year old female).

The first year was hard for me and my family -- the language and schooling (15 year old male).

Loss of one's native language in the mainstream society is one side of the changed linguistic environment.



TABLE 13: Worst thing about living in the U.S. (N=36)

Responses	Percent
English/I can't understand when people talk	30
Leaving family behind	22
Winter/Cold Weather/Snow makes me cold	19
Fighting/A lot of fighting in my life	8
Drug temptation/Friends taking drugs/Drugs & drinking	8
The people	5
Accidents kill	2
Being refused work	2
Loneliness	2
Raking leaves in the fall time	2

The other side is learning the language of the majority society. Native English speakers tend not to realize how difficult a language English is to learn, as the following poem so poignantly illustrates.

A moth is not a moth in mother
 Nor both in bother, broth in brother
 And here is not a match for there
 Nor dear and fear for bear and pear,
 And then there's dose and rose and lose --
 Just look them up -- and goose and choose,
 And cork and work and card and ward,
 And font and front and word and sword,
 And do and go and thwart and cart --
 A dreadful language? Man alive,
 I'd mastered it when I was five!
 (Chomsky, 1970, p. 309).

Learning English is a discouraging task for many non-native speakers. There seems to be more exceptions to the rules than there are rules. It is especially hard for language groups that differ greatly from English. Vietnamese is one of those languages.

Pronunciation

I wish my teacher teach me to speak English in the right way (15 year old male).

The most immediate need of these students is both to understand spoken English and to be readily understood when speaking English. Learning English pronunciation is not an easy task for the Vietnamese student.

The differences between Vietnamese and English are considerable. They are, as languages go, about as different phonologically as they can get, and teaching pronunciation of one to a speaker of the other is no mean feat (Center for Applied Linguistics, n.d., p.7).

The researcher worked with the students at school #3 on reading and vocabulary. Much of the task involved pronouncing and distinguishing the pronunciation of words. For example, one session involved trying to help a female student hear the difference between numbers such as "thirty" and "thirteen." To her they sounded the same. She had difficulty hearing the "n" at the end of the word. It wasn't until she was encouraged to watch the researcher form the words that she began to "hear" the difference.

The pronunciation of sounds in the final position

of a word, such as "s" and final "es", "t," "d," and "b" are unfamiliar to the Vietnamese tongue and ear and as such are often ignored by the Vietnamese in speaking English (Vietnamese Paraprofessional).

Intonation

Vietnamese is a tonal language. Therefore every word is associated with a particular tone of voice. If a speaker does not pronounce the correct tone for a word, he either mispronounces the word or pronounces another word entirely (Center for Applied Linguistics, n.d.). English is not a tonal language, but it does utilize intonation patterns. For example intonation is used to differentiate between the meaning of the sentence "He's a teacher." and the question "He's a teacher?"

The problem for the Vietnamese student is learning that intonation does not change the meaning of words but it does change the meaning of sentences. In this study the students have been observed to have the tendency to listen closely to how words are said, often becoming confused by looking for tones that aren't there.

Patterns of Language

The Vietnamese language is invariable in form. Vietnamese does not use inflectional suffixes such as "play" in contrast to "played," or "book" in contrast to "books" in English. Instead it uses particles to express the same notion (Vietnamese Paraprofessional).

Final consonant clusters involve grammatical problems in addition to phonological ones. The Vietnamese language does not have clusters. In addition, Vietnamese does not

have grammatical endings. Therefore, the students often have difficulty remembering to put the plural, past tense, third person singular, or possessive endings onto the words. Some of these errors can be seen in the student's writings throughout the findings sections of this study.

The use of pronouns creates another problem for the Vietnamese students. When talking with some of the students in English, the researcher noted that frequently the students would use names in place of pronouns such as "my," "I," "your."

Pronouns are not used in Vietnamese. The use of pronouns is considered disrespectful. In Vietnamese we use titles, such as teacher, or names instead (Vietnamese paraprofessional).

Educational Environment

One of the major stressors for children and young people is moving to a different community and entering a new school. This is especially stressful in the teen years because the development of strong peer groups is a major developmental task during these years. For the refugee youth the stressors of moving and entering a new school are enormously magnified because the means for connecting with peers in the new environment are suddenly gone -- that of a common language and culture.

Many of the Vietnamese students in this study touched on these issues in their writings. In response to the question, "Tell me about your first day at school in the

U.S.," common themes revolved around language problems and peer group relationships.

The first day I'm so afraid. I don't understand what they talking about. And the first day I went to school I don't learn anything. I don't know anyone in school and they don't understand the language that I spoke. I don't know how can I make the teacher understand me. My first day of school I don't make any friends at all. I so shy, but about one week ago I'm OK (14 year old female).

When the first day that I came to the school, I afraid that I cannot make it because all is new. I didn't speak any English, and I couldn't understand what the teachers tried to say. But I'm trying to learn. The first time I see Vietnamese teacher in school I'm so happy. And from there my English [ESL] teacher try to help me in my English (15 year old male)

It was confusing in my first day because there was all Americans and they speak the language I have never heard before. The most thing discouraged me about school is when I wanted to ask some questions to teacher in English and when it was time to change classes because I was not used to changing classes (16 year old male).

The first day I went to school I felt I'm from the other planet because my life changed too quickly. My first day at school I felt stupid. I didn't know anything about school such as I didn't know the way to class, how to get lunch and the main problem that I didn't know any English until a few days later. I got a few Vietnamese friends and they helped me, and I was getting better after the first ten days (17 year old male).

Environment of Mainstream Classes

As mentioned in Chapter 4, most of the Vietnamese students in this study are in mainstream classes for at least half of the school day. These classes tend to be quite stressful for these students. Trying to function in classes which are taught in English and trying to function in social situations in which English is the language of

communication are sources of frustration and anxiety for these students. They expend a lot of energy simply trying to get the gist of what teachers and other English speakers are talking about.

The English language continues to be a stumbling block for Vietnamese young people throughout their first few years in the U.S. When the students in this study were asked to describe their mainstream classes, the common theme was frustration over the handicap of having to communicate and learn in a language they do not know. Some of their comments are as follows.

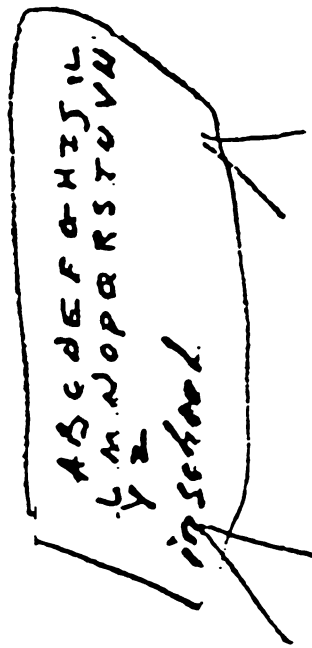
In Vietnam school much easier than here. In Vietnam we learn in our own language, not like here [See Figure 23] (15 year old male).

School in America is more difficult than in Vietnam. It might be the language problem. The first week at school I did not learn anything. Everything was absolutely different and confusing and I felt afraid. Today I'm getting better, but still have a problem (16 year old female).

Regular classes I feel very confused when the teacher talk too fast and when they speak strange words (16 year old male)

I wish my teacher don't embarrass me and would teach me to speaking and writing with the right ways. I wish my teachers understood that my English is limited so they would try to understand the thing I would like to express (17 year old male).

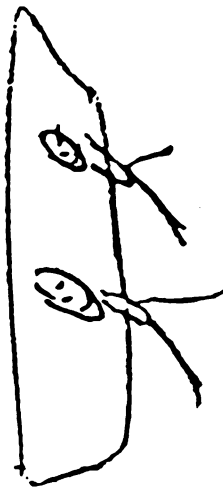
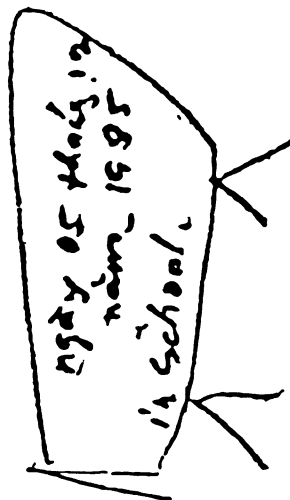
Along with the language barrier, most Vietnamese students are not prepared to function in American schools where students are expected to take active participation in the educational process (Dillard, 1987). As mentioned in Chapter 5, traditional Vietnamese schools emphasize



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USA



VN

Fig. 23: Language Differences in School

memorization and recitation. Students are not encouraged to ask questions nor to demonstrate creative ability.

The school in my country is different from the school in the U.S. is. In my country the students go to school to just listen to teacher and the teacher is show them. They cannot talk in class. There are 4 hours of class in a day. From Monday to Saturday. And the work is easier than here (15 year old male).

Most of the young people in this study grew up in a homogeneous society in Vietnam. Suddenly, in the U.S., they feel conspicuous in a crowd. Most experience being a minority for the first time in their lives.

In regular class there are a lot of Americans except me, because I am Vietnamese (16 year old male).

Many express desire to blend in and are very sensitive of their small statures, in some cases, and their black hair and Asian features. This, along with their insecurity about speaking English, creates a stressful environment for them in mainstream classes. On top of this they must deal with some of the students who tease them and fight with them because they are Vietnamese.

There are many attitudes toward the Vietnamese students in this study, and the range of attitudes can also be seen among the mainstream teachers. A few display elements of prejudice. A majority lack understanding and make no allowances for the cultural-linguistic barrier, expecting the same work from these students as the others in the class. A few display genuine caring, concern and

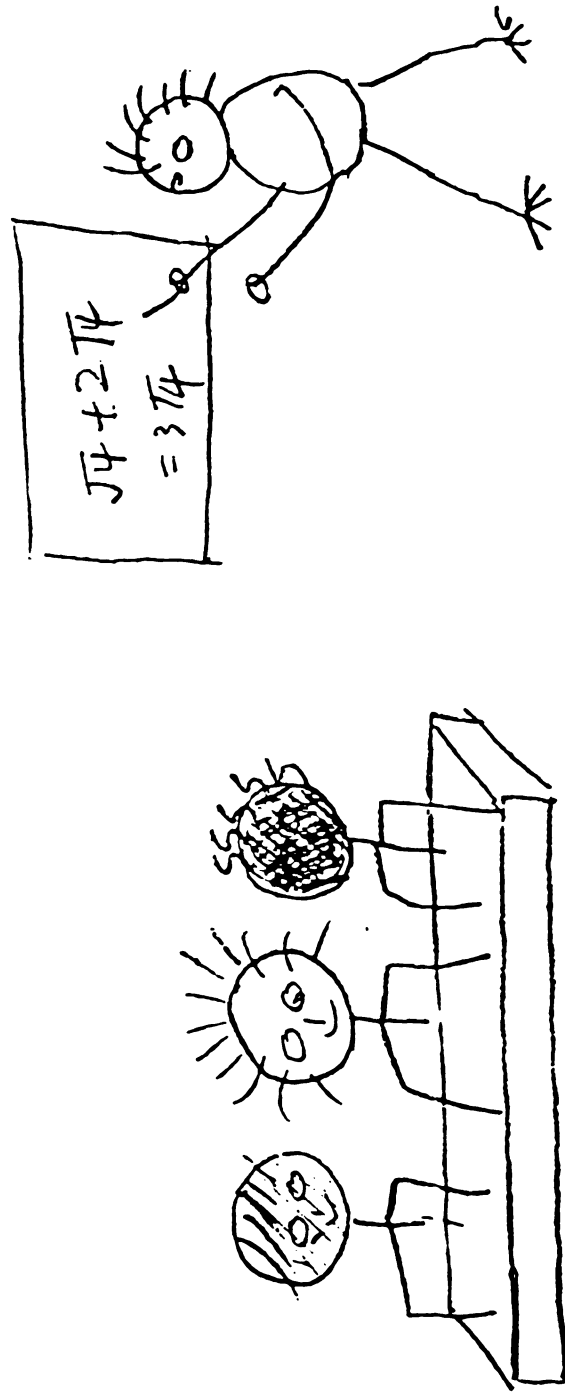
make the extra effort to help these students succeed. One such teacher arranged for the ESL teacher to come in to her class and introduce the new Vietnamese students and share a little about them, such as where they come from and why they are here and how other students can help make their adjustment easier. This mainstream teacher helped to make the way a little easier for these students by sensitizing the mainstream students. Unfortunately such situations are very rare.

For the Vietnamese, the minority experience seems to be a two-sided experience. Several expressed that they were not used to going to school with different races. One student, who stated that in Vietnam he only had Vietnamese classmates, expressed his experience in the U.S. in a picture of his mainstream math class (see Figure 24).

Mainstream classes that are dependent on language are the most difficult for the Vietnamese students. The language barrier is the biggest handicap. There have been several incidents where students who appear to be doing very well in reading English are failing classes. It has been discovered that while they can read the words they do not understand what they are reading.

Mainstream classes tend to be taught with cultural assumptions and with little understanding regarding the degree of difficulty for the Vietnamese students.

One student (15 year old male) had to give a speech on a fish in the Great Lakes. He was to speak about the habitat and he was to bring in a recipe for



the first day school I strangeness because here have various people, a white man, the yellow race, and a colored man.

Fig. 24: Heterogeneity in Mainstream

cooking the fish. The student was totally lost. He didn't know how to go to the library to get information, and he didn't know how to go about finding a recipe since recipe books were unfamiliar to him. His ESL teacher worked with him on these areas (Field notes, March 13, 1990).

Perhaps the difficulty of the Vietnamese students in mainstream is best portrayed by the student drawing in Figure 25.

Math is the one area in which the students, in general, do very well. Some have suggested this may be due to the use of the abacus in learning math in Vietnam. The abacus makes mathematics concrete, tangible, and visualizable instead of being an abstract subject (Carlin, 1979).

Several of the drawings the students drew of themselves in school revolved around math class. Their struggle with content in other classes is not a problem in math class since math is not dependent on language or a cultural frame of reference. Doing well in math may help to boost spirits and, in some cases a faltering self-esteem, when other classes are not going so well. One student drew himself laughing with his math book in hand (Figure 26) Another student shared the following writing.

Yesterday when I was in cafeteria on the line to get lunch, I saw my name on the paper on the wall. I was interested and I asked myself, "What happened to me? Why did they put my name on the paper?" I was afraid because I didn't read the sentence at the top. Then I asked my friend. He said, "Read the sentence." I felt better after I read it because it list about good math student. I very proud when I got a good score math. I hope I will get a good score in all subjects in future. I think it will be if I have good effort and keep working hard (16 year old male).

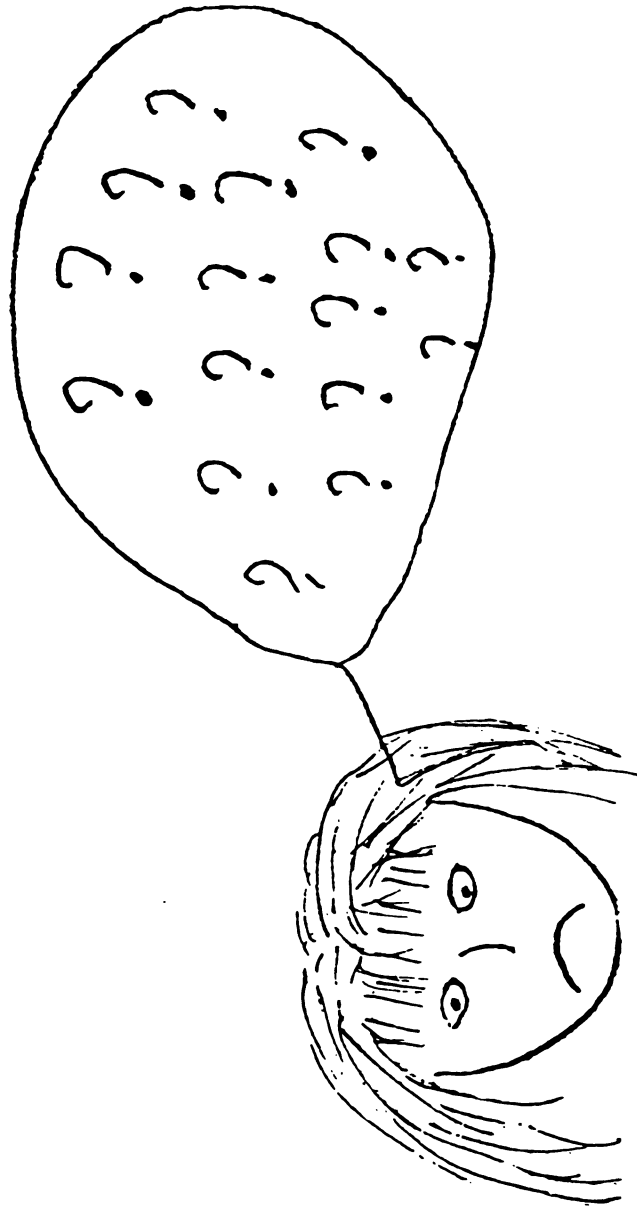


Fig. 25: The Mainstream Experience



Fig. 26: Doing Well in Math

Environment of the ESL Classes

The young people in this study have one to three hours of ESL/bilingual classes a day. These classes are based on individualized need and may involve bilingual tutoring in content area materials, learning English, and learning world geography through ESL methodology.

In ESL class I very much enjoy it. In there I have a good chance to learn more about English and get much help from either American or Vietnamese teacher (17 year old male).

ESL class is very helpful for me in my second language (16 year old male).

In my ESL classes room I learning my English. My teacher and my friend try to help me learning English. They are very good persons. They are try to let me learn to speak. I feel great! (15 year old male).

I am a tenth grader at a different high school, but every day I take the bus to [school #2] where I study the English language. I'm not talking and writing very well. Teacher teaches very well, because when I don't understand I can ask her everything I don't know (16 year old male).

When one enters the ESL class one enters another subculture that greatly differs from the mainstream high school culture.

There are a lot of different people from different countries in ESL class. They learn English and geography. I never have been in ESL before. I really enjoy doing some of the work in this class. I have very nice teachers. They willing to help me in any homework I have trouble with. I have made a lot of nice friends who are from different countries. I really enjoy hanging with them (18 year old female).

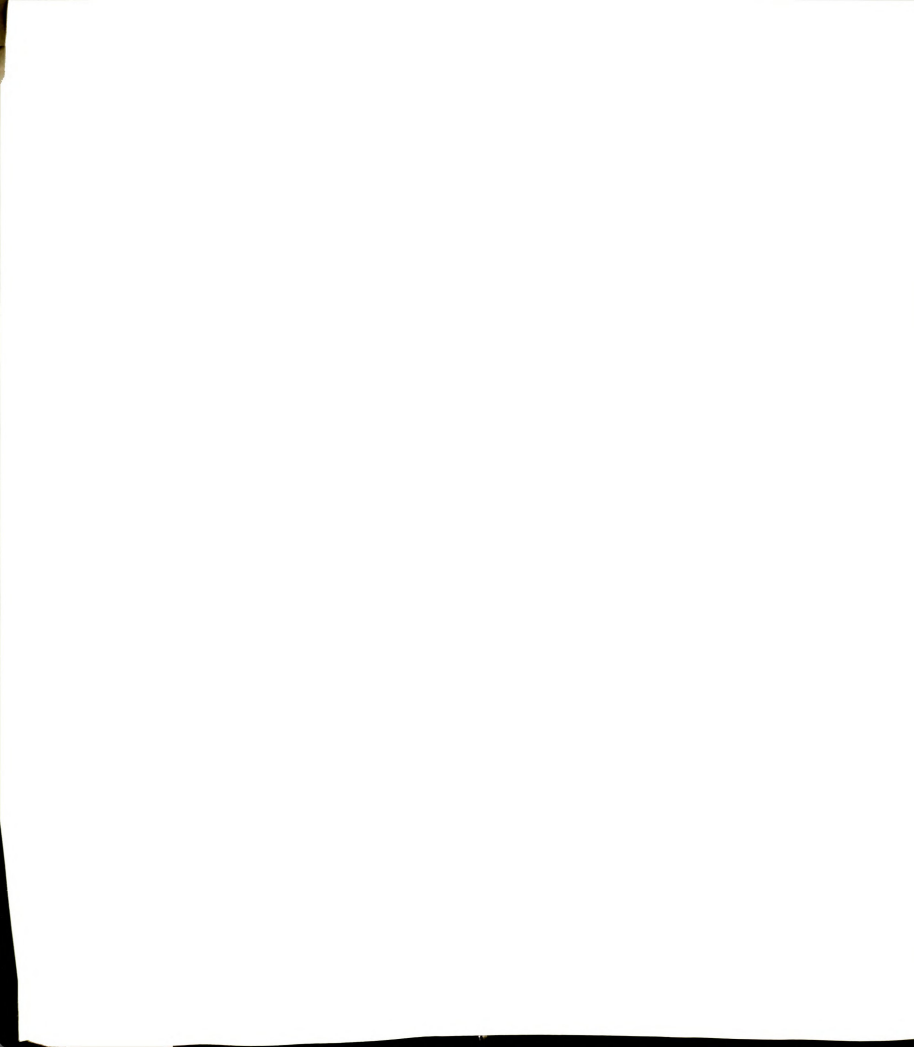
Some of the students are surprised by the parallel experiences of other ethnic groups as the student author of

the following dialogue so beautifully illustrates:

V: I come from Vietnam.
 C: I come from Cuba.
 V: My family escaped because we wanted freedom.
 C: My family escaped because we wanted freedom too.
 Cuba has a communist leader named Fidel Castro.
 V: Vietnam had a communist leader too. His name was
 Ho Chi Minh.
 C: We were afraid of the police in Cuba.
 V: We were afraid of the soldiers in Vietnam.
 C: I hate Fidel, but I love Cuba.
 V: I hate communist, but I like Vietnam. I miss my
 family and friends.
 C: I miss my family and friends too.
 V: Our lives are almost the same.
 C: We even write our numbers the same way.
 V: The only difference is that I speak Vietnamese. . .
 C: And I speak Spanish.
 V: Chau!
 C: Chao!
 THE END (14 year old male)

The multicultural atmosphere and being with same language peers and other peers who are also struggling with English produces a different set of experiences and a different set of behaviors from the Vietnamese students. The researcher observed a group of students in their mainstream classes and in their ESL class on several different occasions. The behavior of the Vietnamese students differed in these two environments as the following observation portrays.

Three of the Vietnamese students, a female and two males, have Science class together. Today the science teacher gave an assignment and the class was expected to discover the answers on their own. Throughout the whole hour, the American students moved around the room getting information from books in the back of the class, going to the library across the hall, working on a computer, and talking together in small groups. Most of the desks were empty as the students milled about the room. In contrast, the Vietnamese students,



sat in their seats working quietly and alone. There was no interaction among them, and only one of the males had a brief conversation with an American female over the assignment.

This observation contrasts with what has been observed of these three in their ESL classrooms. In ESL they socialize freely with classmates and complain openly and frequently to the teacher along with their other classmates. One of the males who is quiet and introverted in mainstream manifests disruptive and acting out behavior in ESL, such as swearing, disobedience and refusing to work (Field notes, January 17, 1990).

Many of the students seem come to come to the ESL class to socialize. They talk to one another in Vietnamese while the other students converse with their language peers, and the teachers have difficulty getting some of the students to work.

I have one ESL class. This is the one class I most like, because the kids in this class always go crazy and they also talk too much [Figure 27]. But its fun (18 year old female).

Perhaps the ESL class is a place which feels safe. In ESL they are not competing in an atmosphere where their language and culture are handicapping them. They are with their true peers. In their writings many talked about the ESL class as the place where they have friends in contrast to the mainstream classes.

Besides ESL, I have 5 regular classes. Each are OK but kind of boring because I don't have many friends to talk with! (16 year old male).

I like ESL better than regular class because in ESL I have friends and they help me when I have hard time with studies (15 year old male).

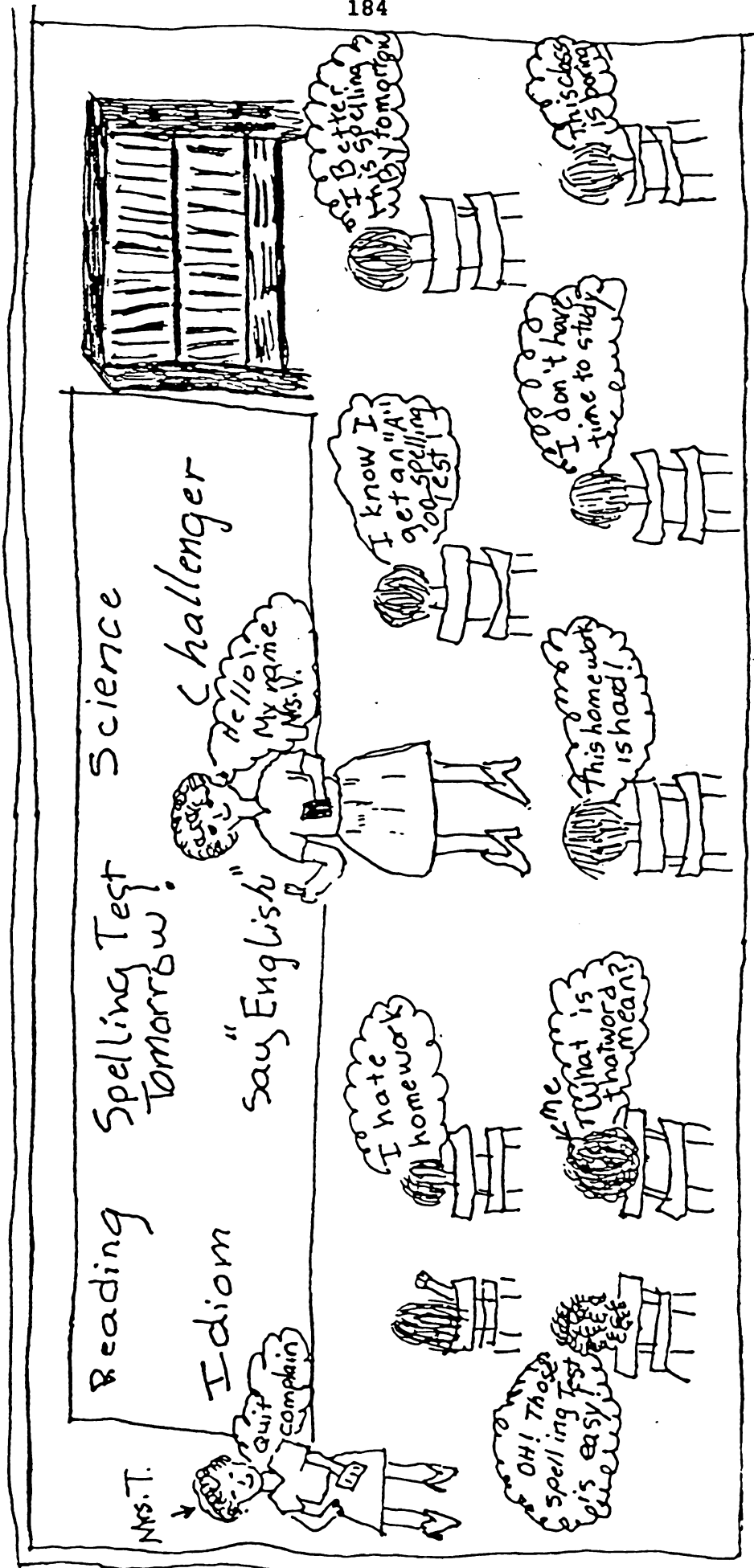


Fig. 27: The ESL/Bilinugal Class

The students were asked what they believed would make them successful in the U.S. The three most frequent answers were education (27%), hard work (25%), and speaking English (17%).

I hope in my future I will be able to speak English very well. I will put forth effort to study English because now its a language I must use daily, and I want to be an engineer (16 year old male).

Stress, Coping and Adaptation

One aspect of understanding the current situation of these young people is being aware of the impact of and responses to the multiplicity of stressors and losses they experience. Stress and loss were explored by asking the students what they worry about most and what makes them sad. Coping styles were explored by asking them what they do when they are sad and angry.

Table 14 contains their responses to what they worry about most. The most frequent worries had to do with school and getting good grades. Other common worries revolved around communicating in English and worrying about family still in Vietnam.

A common theme in the students' writings was feelings of sadness and loneliness. When asked what makes them sad, 31% responded with "missing family/parents" and 22% stated that getting bad grades/failing a test makes them sad (Table 10).

Preoccupation with grades and family also came out in

TABLE 14: What Student's Worry About Most (N=36)

Responses	Percent*
Grades	25
School/Studies/Pressure at school	19
English/Speaking English in the right way	17
My family in Vietnam	17
My future/Dark future	5
My health	5
Money	5
Getting Married	5
Nothing	5
Job	2
Trying to understand people in America	2
Driving the car	2
Being stupid	2
Drugs and Beer	2
Not having enough money to go to college	2

* Total is more than 100 percent since a few students gave more than one answer.

their responses to the question, "What makes you happy?"

The two top responses were "getting good grades/getting an A," (38%) and "thinking about when my family comes to live with me" (19%). Fourteen percent stated that they are not

happy.

Some of the students in this study seem to be coping with tremendous stress and overcoming obstacles in their education by putting forth extra effort and hard work. For those who are succeeding in school, and in some cases excelling, one of the common traits they seem to share is a belief in hard work.

Everyday I go to school and go home with only one purpose -- to gain more knowledge. (15 year old male).

I go to school from 8:30 in the morning until 2:30. After school each day, I have to study for at least two hours. Then I can watch T.V. That is what I do daily (13 year old male).

I take my notes with me wherever I go. I study on the bus, at lunch, use all the free time I have for studying at home. I made it on the National Honor Society this year (16 year old male).

The regular classes are more harder than ESL. But I try my best to get good grades. I really want my parents to be happy and proud of me (17 year old female).

In the face of English limitations, cultural ambiguities, and stigma/prejudice, clustering with own language-cultural group seems to be a common coping response. Trying to function as "normal" in the majority society takes a tremendous amount of energy. Staying with others who are similar is a source of support and identity and saves much energy that would have to be expended in frustrating interactions with those of the majority society.

We came to Michigan on September 6, 1987. I made a lot of friends. Most of my friends are Asian. They

helped me with my school work in school (16 year old male).

When I talk American students don't understand me, and the teachers don't understand me too. I wish my teacher understood how I feel to work with the American student (16 year old female).

Clustering in hallways and lunchrooms may be beneficial in some respects, but it has also created social problems.

At school #1 the principal mentioned that the American students have been complaining to the teachers and principle that no matter how hard they try they can't seem to befriend the Vietnamese students. The American students perceive the Vietnamese students as isolating themselves, speaking only in Vietnamese and excluding American kids from their little groups (Field notes, March 5, 1990).

Clustering was also observed in the ESL classes, particularly during study hours and during class and school parties. In general, the male Vietnamese grouped together, the male Europeans grouped, and the male Hispanics grouped. The females seemed to be relatively integrated ethnically, though they formed a cluster group of their own based on gender.

Besides hard work and clustering, other coping styles were revealed by asking the students what they do when they are sad and what they do when they are angry. Table 15 shows their coping responses to feelings of sadness. Twenty-eight percent listen to music, and 22% percent go to bed/sleep. Other frequent responses are withdrawing by being quiet/being alone (19%) and numbing the feelings

Table 15: Responses to Sadness (N=36)

Responses	Percent
Listen to Music/Listen to radio	28
Sleep/go to bed	22
Get quiet/Be alone	19
Drink beer/Drink and smoke/Smoke reefers	14
Watch TV	8
Play video games	8
Cry	5
Talk to someone or write a letter	2
Swear	2
I try my best to make myself happy	2

* The total is more than 100 percent since a few students gave more than one answer.

through the use of alcohol and marijuana (14%).

Anger is a common emotional reaction to stress and loss. When asked what they do when they are angry, the three most common responses were swearing, becoming quiet/silent, and yelling. Other frequent responses involved withdrawing and smoking marijuana (Table 16).

For the first few months to a year most of the students seemed to manifest patterns associated with the "honeymoon" stage of cultural adaptation. The teachers

Table 16: Coping Responses to Feelings of Anger (N=36)

Responses	Percent
Swear	19
Silence/get quiet	17
Yell/"I am hit the ceiling"	17
Go home/Stay home/Be alone	11
Smoke/Go to mall for reefers	8
I don't know	8
Cry	5
Sleep	5
Go to temple	2
Break things	2
Hit	2
Throw anything I see away	2
Walk around	2

described students in this stage as "bright-eyed, intrigued by everything that was new and eager to work and please." They seem to look at their new country through "rose-colored glasses" with high and unrealistic expectations.

By six months to a year, most seem to begin to realize that life in the U.S. is not as rosy as they had expected. It is not fun nor easy nor comfortable, but a

lot of hard work and discomfort, especially for minorities with limited English proficiency. As the honeymoon stage ends and disappointment sets in, these students seem to respond with depression, frequent complaining, a drop in academic motivation and performance, use of profanity, and, in some cases, acting out. Eventually, most appear to adapt by giving up their unrealistic expectations, setting goals and buckling down for a long haul of hard work. Some, however, begin a journey down a road of increasing academic and behavioral problems.

Maladaptation and Special Problems

A number of academic and behavioral problems were noted among some of the students in this study, particularly by the undereducated, the unaccompanied minors, and the Amerasians. Some of these problems will be explored below. Amerasians will be covered in Chapter 9.

Academic and behavioral problems have been noted among those students who have large gaps in their education, and especially those who have had little to no education. One student (12 year old male) had no previous education. He seemed to have difficulty with the restrictions of a classroom.

A 12 year old male student left school at 10:00 a.m. According to his ESL teacher, he frequently gets up and leaves when he's tired of being there and frequently leaves the school after ESL and wanders around the area when he is supposed to be in mainstream. He has also displayed academic problems, particularly with retaining information. For example,

he does not remember colors even in his own language. The teachers are unsure if his problems are due to severe social deprivation, mental impairment, or substance abuse (Field notes, January 17, 1990).

Another problem manifested in the ESL classroom seemed to be racial/ethnic tension that sometimes erupted into fighting. This has occurred mostly in school #2 which has the most diverse group of students. Racial tension seems most troublesome between Vietnamese and Hispanics, Vietnamese and Arabs, and Vietnamese and Amerasians.

Some academic problems seem to be related to loss and stress. For example, one student (17 year old unaccompanied male) is doing so poorly in ESL and mainstream that he is nearly failing the year. He has a sad demeanor, is quiet, does not participate with peers, seems to lack motivation to complete assignments, has a high absentee record, and recently dropped out of school for a period of time. He has had problems in his foster home and recently moved in with a friend who is living on his own. He does not have a job. Recently he revealed that he was raised by his grandmother in Vietnam. After the war his parents took him to the grandmother because they were planning to escape Vietnam. Before they could escape they were shot down and killed in the street. This student has no brothers or sisters and says he is all alone in this world.

Another student (16 year old unaccompanied male) has been in the U.S. for almost two years. He did well in

school last year but has recently begun acting out in ESL class.

One of the male students was asked to do something and he got angry and swore at the teacher. He was sent to the principal's office. Partway through class the principal (an Afro-American) returned to the ESL class with the student and had him apologize. As the principal turned to leave, the student muttered something.

P: (whirls around) What did you say?

S: I don't know.

P: (talks to him about respecting the teachers) Don't ever talk to them that way again. Do you understand me?

S: No.

P: (looks exasperated and repeats what he said) Now do you understand me?

S: No.

P: (grabs him by the shoulders and puts his face an inch from the student's and yells at him. The other students are dead silent)

S: (Tears well up in his eyes, but his jaw is set)

P: (Leaves the room. He later expresses to the teacher that he left in exasperation after being unable to break this student's defiance) (Field notes, February 12, 1990).

When asked to draw a picture of himself in school, this student drew a picture of a muscular male who looks tough and has a grim expression on his face (Figure 28).

Whatever is triggering this student's behavior, he faces an added stressor -- a Vietnamese tutor who has, on occasion, berated him in front of the class, saying he should not be in ESL because he does not deserve it. In a staff meeting it was revealed that, in Vietnam, students who misbehave are harshly disciplined, such as beatings. If they continue to misbehave they are kicked out of



Fig. 28: Self-Portrait in School

school. As one of the paraprofessionals stated, "Teachers do not waste time on students who do not want to learn." Because of this orientation, there is little patience on the part of some Vietnamese staff to work with students who are manifesting emotional and adaptational struggles by acting out in the ESL class.

Another student (17 year old unaccompanied minor) who is manifesting behavioral problems had been tricked into coming to the U.S. with his brother. He was told he was going to Saigon and ended up in an escape boat out of Vietnam. This student also spent three years in a refugee camp during which time he did not go to school or work. His experiences seem to have made him ripe for adjustment problems. Around six months after arriving in the U.S. he began manifesting behavioral problems in the ESL class, such as swearing, acting out, talking back, disrupting the class. Along with behavioral changes came changes in appearance. He grew his hair long and donned an earring and a black leather jacket. He also began drinking and smoking marijuana, coming to class drunk on one occasion, and frequently missing Mondays after a long weekend of drinking and partying.

Drinking is a problem displayed by several males in this study. In one family all the members drink on a frequent basis, including the 12 year old mentioned above. Reasons for drinking are varied among the students and, while some began abusing substances in the U.S., others

began in Vietnam. One student shares how and why he began to drink.

I am the third son of my mother. Our family had to live separately for three years. When I was twelve years old, my parents came to the U.S.A. without their children. Imagine three boys with no parents in the house. I thought I had found my freedom. But after a while my second oldest brother was boss over me. He would say, "Do that" or "Take this." He was killing me. When I didn't listen to him, he would beat me until I did it.

After a while, I thought about killing myself. How would I do it? My brother caught me setting fire to the oil in my bedroom. First he beat me. He was beating me so hard I thought it was my last day to live. But after beating me, he held me tight on his knees. He started crying for me. We held each other and cried for hours. Then he took me to the bar where he taught me to drink and smoke. Drinking and smoking helped me until I was able to come to the U.S. to be with my parents (17 year old male).

Plans and Outlook on the Future

The students were asked what their plans were for the future. Forty-two percent stated that their future plan was to get a job. Some of the students prefaced the answer with "to study and then get a good job" or "to learn English and then get a good job". Nineteen percent stated that their plan for the future was to sponsor their family. Thirteen percent stated that they plan to go to college.

When asked what occupation they hope to have in the future, twenty-two percent stated that they didn't know (Table 17). The majority of the occupations listed were blue collar, such as factory workers and mechanics. The students who are doing well in school tend to be the

TABLE 17: Occupational Plans

Responses	Percent
I don't know/Haven't decided	22
Factory Worker	17
Mechanic	17
Tool & Die Maker	13
Sewing	5
Engineer	5
Doctor	5
Office Worker	2
Computer Design	2
Machine Metals	2
Construction	2
Travel Agent	2
Carpenter	2
Nurse	2
Secretary	2

ones aspiring to white collar and professional careers, such as engineer and doctor.

Some of the young people, in reflecting on the future, made the following comments.

Now I am living and studying in the U.S. I'm very happy because now I really have freedom. I hope I will be a good student and a good citizen to serve the

U.S., the country that helped me and saved my life (15 year old male).

I have been going to school every day. I will strive to achieve my best in education and be a good citizen (14 year old male).

I am in High School and trying to learn English. I will go on to college to continue my education. I want to be an electronic engineer. I hope I will get a good job in my future and get married to a beautiful girl (16 year old male).

When I graduate I would like to become a RPN (Register Practical Nurse) or maybe I would like to complete my vocational diploma at the Skills Center. Then I hope to get a good job. Especially, I hope to see my family in the United States and get married with a nice girl. Finally, I'm so glad to be here and thankful to everyone who helped me since I have come to America because I have a good education and real freedom. Consequently, I will never forget all the people who are still living under communism because they don't want their country to become a free country. So I hope someday I can go back to Vietnam and help those people (17 year old male).

Summary

These young people face incredible challenges and obstacles to successful adaptation at school, at home, and in the community. They must simultaneously work through grief and anger over their multiple losses, adapt to multiple changes, and deal with the stress of high expectations from family, from school, and even from within themselves. They depend on the ESL/Bilingual classes as a bridge to mainstream classes and society as well as a source for friendship and peer group belongingness. While they vary in their coping styles to loss and stress, common patterns include working hard, clustering with own language group, listening to music, withdrawal behaviors, and

swearing. Some manifest problems in the classroom, such as lack of previous education, racial/ethnic tension, disobedience and disrespect, depression and anger, and substance abuse. Common aspirations for the future involve getting a good job, mostly blue collar jobs, and bringing their family to the U.S.

Chapter 9

FINDINGS VI: THE AMERASIAN EXPERIENCE

I am *mỹ lai* . . . I have two kinds of blood, two languages, two countries (United States Catholic Conference, 1985, p. 31).

The Amerasians are, in some ways, distinctly different from the rest of the Vietnamese students in this study. Therefore, a separate chapter devoted to their unique issues seemed appropriate and necessary. What follows is an attempt to piece together some of the Amerasian experience.

Growing up in Vietnam

While everyone suffered under the economic conditions of post war Vietnam, one small minority had a harder time than the others -- the Amerasians and their mothers (Gilzow, 1989; United States Catholic Conference, 1985). For example, the government made periodic efforts to send all Amerasian families to New Economic Zones, wild tracts of land that had never been settled, much less farmed (United States Catholic Conference, 1985).

** I was born and brought up in a small village where there were no cars or electricity. Most people were poor, not because we were lazy but because the soil is not very rich, and we didn't have enough tools to work with. My family were working real hard in order to get enough food to eat (18 year old female).*

For mothers of Amerasians, the time after the war was particularly stressful. They faced discrimination such as

ridicule, denial of jobs, and general social ostracism (United States Catholic Conference, 1985). Their children betrayed the associations of their past, and some mothers did all they could to mask that past. Most Amerasians were given up by their mothers at birth (Gilzow, 1989). Some had been unplanned births and were not welcome. Most mothers left their Amerasian offspring in the care of grandparents in the countryside, or abandoned them to orphanages, or gave them away to other families willing to raise them. Some, however, clung to their children and defiantly faced the discrimination and uncertain future.

I: What was your mother's occupation in Vietnam?

S: She was a seller for a couple years then she just stayed at home with my grandparents.

I: Did she have problems in Vietnam because of her connections with Americans?

S: Yes, they took her to jail just after the Americans left in 1975 and they expected her to do a lot of hard work for them. It was the same for other women who married Americans (Field notes, March 9, 1990).

All the Amerasians in this study grew up without their fathers, and most grew up without their mother as well.

I don't know who my father is, but my mother said he fought in the war (16 year old female).

* *My mother died when I was three. I don't have a father (17 year old male).*

Most of the Amerasian students in this study were raised by foster families and were sometimes shuffled around. One student's family experience can be seen most dramatically in her time line.

1972 -- my birth in Saigon
 1975 -- I move to grandmother
 1976 -- I move to another grandmother [foster]
 1977 -- I start school; brother died; I quit school; I
 go to work
 1978 -- I move to my uncle
 1979 -- I came back to my grandmother [foster]
 1980 -- Grandmother died; I went to another mother
 [foster]
 1983 -- My mother [biological] came and I go to live
 with her
 1986 -- I leave my country with my mother (17 year old
 female)

Discrimination and Abuse

The majority of Amerasians were forced early in life to fend for themselves in an inhospitable -- if not downright hostile -- environment (United States Catholic Conference, 1985, p. 16).

Within Vietnamese culture, identity is strongly tied to one's father's identity. Without a father and with the anti-American political rhetoric present in post-war Vietnam, a situation emerges in which some degree of discrimination is inevitable (United States Catholic Conference, 1985). A female Amerasian (age 17) shared the following:

I: Did you have any problems in Vietnam as an Amerasian?

S: Yes, the kids always were picking on me. They called me a name that means half-American and half-Vietnamese. I'll never forget that word.

I: How did you feel when they called you that?

S: It made me feel like I was different from other people. Kind of embarrassed. And they picked on me because I didn't have a father and they did (Field notes, February 13, 1990).

As persons of mixed race whose mothers consorted with the enemy, Amerasians have been ready targets for

discrimination and ridicule in school and community.

When I went school, some of the students treat me not good. They make fun of me and my brother because we were Amerasian. Some teachers didn't treat us like the others. The neighbors treat my mother bad. They made story about my mom. I felt sad and sometimes I cry for it. And the children told the story too. When we heard that my brother get into a fight and their dad and mom come to our house and tell my mom, my mom get mad and yell at us not to get in fight again. Because my mother wanted our family to have a better life and because my brother and I were Amerasian, I come to America with my family. I don't know how long will I stay here. I think I don't have a chance to go back to my country. But if I lived there again, they would treat me the same way again (16 year old male).

The degree of discrimination varies from province to province, with little to no discrimination in some and extreme discrimination in others (Gilzow, 1989). The degree of prejudice and harassment also varies according to ethnic mix. One student whose father was Anglo-American was treated worse than her sister whose father was Filipino. But she was not treated as badly as those who were black Amerasians. She shares the following:

I: Were there other Amerasians in your village?

S: Yes, a few.

I: Did they receive the same kind of treatment?

S: Yes, and we were all good friends.

I: In your village were any of the Amerasians black?

S: Yes, there were some.

I: How were they treated?

S: They were treated worse. They didn't call them *Mỹ Lai* [half-breed]. They called them a dirty word. A really bad word.

Being a black Amerasian means having to endure greater abuse and discrimination than other Amerasians. They seem to have three strikes against them: they have no father,

they are Amerasian, and they are black.

My wife and I decided to adopt an orphan. We wanted to adopt a child with a handicap, knowing that it was unlikely that anyone would adopt such a child. When we talked to the people at the orphanage, they said, "fine," and brought us a black Amerasian who seemed normal in every way. We asked them what the handicap was. They told us, "She's black" (United States Catholic Conference, 1985, p. 29).

- * *It was very difficult for me and my family while living in Vietnam. Being an Amerasian child, especially a black Amerasian, I face many problems with the people outdoor. Therefore, I will never forget the place where I was born and the moments that I had been through (18 year old female).*

Name calling is a common occurrence in the Amerasian's life. Besides the word *mỹ lai* (half-breed) many are also called *bui doi* (dust of life). This refers to the underside of the social strata in Vietnam's cities (Lutheran Social Services, 1985). In many cases they experienced such an existence. Some 12,000 Amerasians grew up on the streets (Wright, 1989). They were abandoned, orphaned, or ran away from home because of abuse.

The foster mother of a black Amerasian student shared that, in Vietnam, he had been the object of abuse in his home. His uncle beat him frequently. When the boy was ten he was kicked out of his home and had to fend for himself on the streets (Field notes, April, 1990).

Most of the Amerasians in this study have endured not only discrimination and abuse from those outside the family, but also from within the family. For example, one student (18 year old female) who was raised by a foster family was expected to carry out the duties of a maid, to contribute

financially to the home by selling food on the streets, and to endure frequent beatings by the family. Another student (18 year old male) ran away from home at age six to escape abuse. Another student (17 year old female) shared that even though she has been the object of physical and emotional abuse ever since she can remember, it is the emotional abuse that hurts the most.

School and Work

The Amerasians in this study had the least amount of education compared to the other Vietnamese students. One of the reasons seems to have been that some of the families simply did not have the money to send them or were unwilling to spend money for the Amerasian, especially if the child was not their own. One of the students in this study was the only one in her foster family and in the whole village who could not go to school. She was also the only Amerasian in the village.

I: Was the reason you couldn't go to school because you were Amerasian?

S: No. It's because we couldn't afford it.

I: But they could afford to send all the other children?

S: Yes. But they didn't have enough money for me (Field notes, January 23, 1990).

Most of the Amerasians in this study seemed to have been brought up to value work over education. When the students were asked if they worked in Vietnam to help support the family, 100% of the Amerasians said they did compared to 51% of the other students. In addition, the

Amerasians began working at young ages, typically around age six or seven. This can be compared to their ethnic Vietnamese counterparts who typically began working around age 15.

When I was six I have to go to work. I carry stuff for people and I help to sell stuff. When I a little older I go to work and after work I come home and I have to get water. I have to carry two big pails. Then I have to cook for my grandmother, aunt, uncle, and my little sister. After that I have to clean everything after eating. After that I go take bath. Morning I have to get up early to cook before I go to work (17 year old female).

When my sisters were fifteen, they dropped out of school to help my mother. When I was about six years I went out to work to help my family. (16 year old male).

- * *Being a little child, I had to quit school to help my sister carry stuff to the market to sell everyday from morning to evening (18 year old female).*

Those who did go to school usually dropped out because of the discrimination and ridicule to which they were subjected (Lutheran Social Services, 1985). With America reputed to be the source of all evil in Vietnam, Amerasians are easy targets in the school.

Some of these young people grew up surrounded by the daily taunting of peers and others: "Go back to America!" "Mỹ Lai (half-breed)!" "Bui Doi (dust of the earth!)" Some did not understand or believe it. One student shared that she did not know she was Amerasian until she was fifteen years old. She only knew that she was "different." When people taunted her, she thought they were wrong. She would look in the mirror and say, "I'm Vietnamese just like them!

Aren't I?" She began to develop doubts when she was around 15. In search of the truth, she traveled to see her biological grandmother. She asked her if what the people were saying about her was true.

"Yes," her grandmother said, "you are a mixed blood."

Leaving Home

** I didn't want to leave Vietnam. The reason I left was because the government kicked us out because we are Amerasian (17 year old male).*

In 1982 the U.S. government made an agreement with the Vietnamese government to give Amerasian families top priority for Orderly Departure Program (ODP) processing. This was news many Amerasian families found almost too good to be true (United States Catholic Conference, 1985). They learned of it through notices posted in local police stations, through whispers in the marketplace, or via relatives. Initially, only the boldest or most desperate registered, since most of the people believed it was a trap.

I: Who made the decision to leave Vietnam?

S: My mom and my grandparents. As soon as my mom heard that American kids could leave Vietnam she registered us for leaving. Only she and my grandparents believed it was true. My other relatives didn't believe it.

I: Did they think it was a trap?

S: Yes (Field notes, February 13, 1990).

In 1987 Congress passed the Amerasian Homecoming Act which allowed entire families of Amerasian children born

between 1962 and 1976 to come to the U.S. by the end of 1990 (Gilzow, 1989). March of 1990 was the deadline for these families to get out of Vietnam and arrive in the Refugee transit centers.

Amerasians applying to leave Vietnam face an unrivaled bureaucratic chain (United States Catholic Conference, 1985). Applications must move through several levels. For potential applicants, these difficulties are compounded by Vietnam's poor communications systems and by the cost of making the journey from distant provinces to Ho Chi Minh City to be interviewed.

After the Amerasians and their families are registered to leave Vietnam, it may take two to five years or more before they are allowed to leave. In the meantime the Vietnamese government disenfranchises them. Once the family's name is on a list they can no longer legally work or go to school (Gilzow, 1989).

I: After you registered, how long did you have to wait before you left Vietnam?

S: Two years. I wasn't allowed to go to school anymore (Field notes, February 9, 1990).

** We registered for the interview when I was age 11. Five years later we got an interview. We left Vietnam and stayed in the Philippines for eight months. Then we came to America (18 year old female).*

** When I was 10 I was registered for coming to America. When I was 15 I left Vietnam (17 year old male).*

All but two Amerasians in this study left with their biological mothers or with someone who pretended to be.

One of the male students stated that he had come to the U.S. with a woman who pretended to be his mother so that she could come to the U.S. Another student who had been kicked out of his home in Vietnam and lived on the streets found out that his mother left Vietnam and came to the U.S. with another Amerasian who was not her own (Field notes, December 19, 1990).

Leaving legally by plane is another contrast to the ethnic Vietnamese who escaped by boat.

- * I was sitting in the airport waiting for people to call my name. My heart was pounding real hard. This was my first time to ever fly. Five minutes before the airplane took off all my friends stood behind the glass wall. They were crying and waving goodbye [Figure 29]. This was such an emotional moment I could not hold back my tears. I cried aloud. "Goodbye friends! I don't know if I ever have a chance to see you all again," I said. The airplane took off so fast. I sat by the window. I turned my head to look down for the last time. "Goodbye Vietnam, my love" (17 year old male).
- * Today I'm going to tell you a short story about how I left Vietnam. Two hours before the planes take off, my family and I say good by to my relatives and friends. My mom cried aloud and I almost cry. I realized that this is a last chance for me to see my friends and I might never see them again. Sitting in the plane looking through the window I saw many people waving good bye. My heart was almost broke in pieces (18 year old male).

Because my mother wanted our family to have a better life and because me and my brother were Amerasian, I came America with my mother and my brother, but my sister, brother-in-law, nieces and nephew stayed in Vietnam. When I heard that I was going to the United States, I felt that I going to miss my friends. When I arrived at the airport, I hugged my nieces and they didn't want to let go of me. I had never ever cried like that in my life. When the plane landed in Thailand, the guy's name was Jone. He frightened me when I arrived at the camp and I will remember him forever. That I'll never going to forget (16 year old male).

Leaving VN.



Fig. 29: Leaving Vietnam by Plane

In the United States

While the Amerasians in this study face many of the same issues in adjusting to their new lives in the United States as the other Vietnamese students, some contrasts were noted.

Socio-Cultural Environment

Most of the Amerasians in this study grew up in rural areas of Vietnam and seem to have a higher degree of culture shock and socio-cultural stress than their ethnic Vietnamese counterparts. This was particularly noted among the female students at school #3 as the following shows.

The teacher at school #3 shared the following. At the beginning of the school year she took the class to a supermarket for an outing. Once they got to the store, two of the girls (ages 18) refused to get out of the car. They were terrified. They had never seen nor been in a supermarket before. The teacher tried to talk them into going in, but they could not be convinced. They ended up staying in the car for the whole outing while the teacher and the male students went in to the store (Field notes, December 22, 1989).

Family Environment

Mothers of Amerasians tend to be dependent and some lack parenting skills (Gilzow, 1989; Lutheran Social Services, 1985; United States Catholic Conference, 1985). They tend to have low educational and English language levels. Their dependency needs may lead them into relationships with men, relationships which can be dysfunctional for them and for their children.

The ESL teacher shared that two of the Amerasians in

this study are sisters. They live with their mother and her boyfriend. The boyfriend has tried to force the mother to give up her two girls and beats her because she refuses (Field notes, January 9, 1990).

Abuse has also occurred in the home of another female Amerasian who came to the U.S. with her foster sister. She had been the object of abuse in Vietnam and this continues in the U.S. with her foster sister. She expressed her feelings in the following writing:

** I wish my sister understood my difficult life as an Amerasian. I wish my sister would treat me like her real sister and not like a slave (18 year old female)*

Black Amerasians are often called *mỹ den lai* which is a very degrading term referring to being a child of a prostitute. While not always the case, some mothers of Amerasians were prostitutes (Gilzow, 1989) and some Amerasians were also forced to survive through prostitution. One student hinted at such a situation in the following writing.

When I marry, if they know my family they will tell I'm very cheap and they never be good to me (17 year old female).

This student drew a picture of the people living in their two bedroom apartment. These included herself, her boyfriend, her mother's boyfriend who she labeled as "Dad," her mother and her brother (Figure 30). While her drawing portrays a cozy picture of family life, in reality this student suffers under continual verbal-emotional abuse

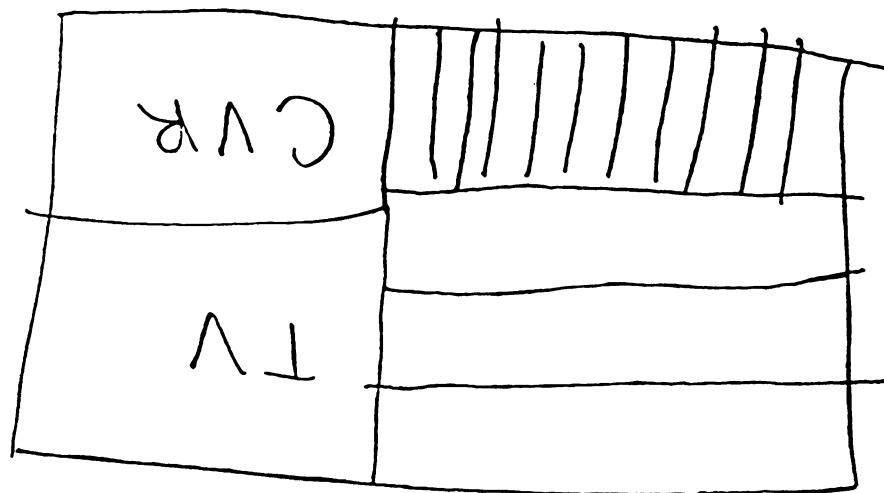
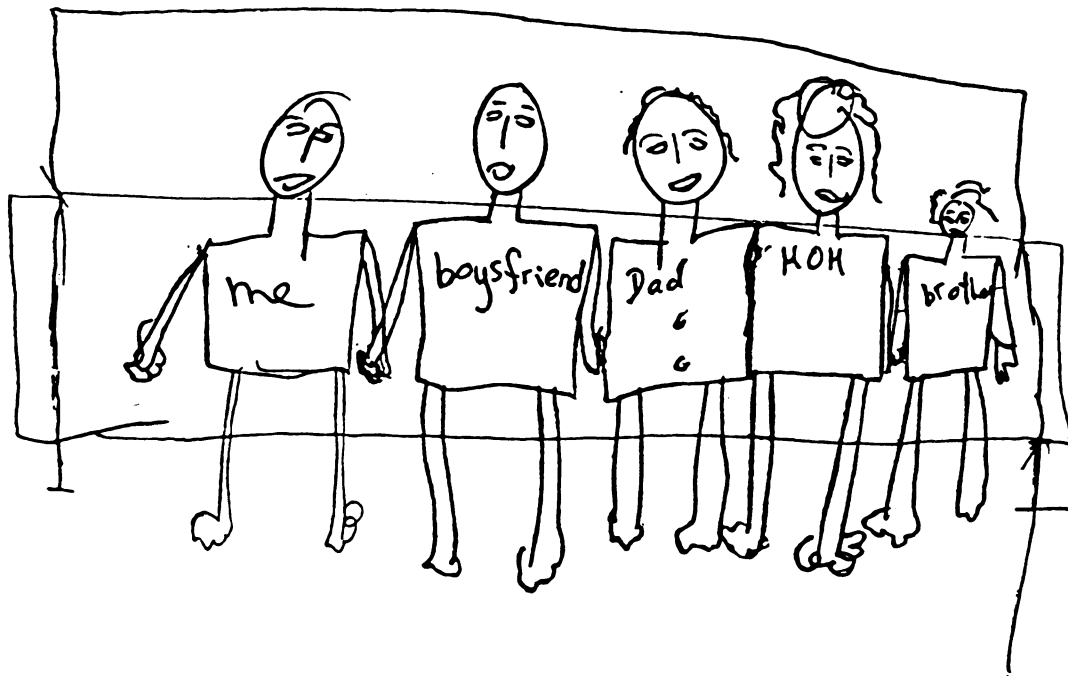


Fig. 30: Members in Household

from the mother's boyfriend as well as physical abuse from her mother.

One factor which may play a role in the individual Amerasian's adjustment to the United States is the question of who raised the Amerasian in Vietnam and whether that primary caregiver is the one who accompanied him/her to this country (United States Catholic Conference, 1985). A couple of the Amerasian males in this study were abandoned by their mothers after arrival in the U.S. One of them recounted that the woman he came over with was not his real mother. She simply said she was so that she could get out of Vietnam. This student wrote about his experience and feelings as follows:

** My first day in the United States was a wonderful day. Everything was new and beautiful. I came here with my mother [not real mother] and we lived in Texas for a short time. Then my mom left me to come to another state to get married to somebody I never knew of. I hate her for doing that to me. I stayed in Texas alone with a strange family, and I felt helpless and lonely. After my mom [foster mom] moved out a month and a half later, I moved to another house with a Vietnamese family who owned a restaurant in town. These people treated me like their own son, and they offered me a job in the restaurant. Time went by so fast, almost 2 years working in Texas but with no education. I decided to move to Michigan. I wanted to go to school (17 year old male).*

Some of the Amerasian males had difficulty living in foster care. One lived in several different homes. He ran away a few times, being gone for up to a week with no one knowing where he was. On one occasion he attacked his foster father with a knife. He was subsequently put into

an adult foster care home. Another Amerasian male stole money from his foster family and ran away for a few days. He wrote the following after that incident:

- * *When I came to Michigan they put me into an American foster family. This family so nice and care for me alot [Figure 31]. I realize that my foster parents adopted me not because of the money, but because they love and care for kids like me. And I also love them like my real parents. However, being a young adult, I love to go out and to dance and have fun. Sometimes I couldn't control myself, and I broke the house rules. My mom and dad were upset with me for doing that to them. I know that I was wrong, and I promise not to let it happen again in the future (17 year old male).*

A few weeks after writing this, the student ran away from home and dropped out of school.

Problems in the Classroom

Most Amerasians have a very low self-esteem and are sensitive to failure (Gilzow, 1989; Lutheran Social Services, 1985). Most enter school with the expectation of being the brunt of harrassment as they bring their past experiences into the U.S. classroom setting. For example, while all the students in this study mentioned how nervous and scared they were on their first day of school in the United States, the Amerasians seemed to express a deeper fear which related to being ridiculed for mistakes.

- * *The first day at school in America I was so afraid. I was afraid to talk to people. I was afraid if I made a mistake people would laugh at me. Today I'm getting used to school. Today I feel so much empathy for one of my classmates. He is stubborn and did not listen to the teacher. I'm surprised why he does not want to learn (18 year old female).*



My Room

Fig. 31: Amerasian in American Foster Home

On the first day I come to school, I'm really scares to be in school because I did not know anyone. First time teacher tell me to learn some kind of fruit and how to speak for how other people can understand me. That is not hard but I scare to speak. But the teacher ask a question. I know that answer. I tell teacher. She tell to raise your hand first then answer O.K. [Figure 32]. Teacher really proud of me because the first time I answer and I speak right word too. No one laugh at me (17 year old female).

The fear of being the brunt of harassment and discrimination was graphically portrayed by a black Amerasian on his first day at school.

A new student came to school #3 today. A 17 year old black Amerasian. He popped his head in the class then jumped right back out. Later his foster mother shared that he was frightened when he saw Vietnamese students. She stated that he had been severely discriminated against in Vietnam. She stated that he even had trouble trusting his Vietnamese caseworker (Field notes, April 11, 1990).

Lack of Previous Education

In general, the Amerasians in this study had less education than the other students, had fewer social skills in school, such as wandering around the room and out of the room, talking, being generally disruptive, and they seemed to have more learning disabilities, possibly due to neglect and abuse. Lack of previous education seems to be a major contributing factor to academic and behavioral problems in the classroom. Figure 9 (p. 103) shows the educational background of the young people in this study. The Amerasians are on the lower end with zero to four years of schooling, the average being two years. Problems manifested by lack of previous education seem to be limited



Fig. 32: Learning to Raise Hand in School

attention span, for some as little as five minutes, feeling they are "stupid" or "dumb," lack of socialization to a classroom environment, and lack of motivation.

Limited education is particularly a major obstacle for newly arrived older teenagers. They have less time to catch up than younger refugee students, and are frequently placed in settings that may not be conducive to their particular needs.

- * *When I first came to America, people put me in high school. I was shocked. I didn't know anything (18 year old male with 3rd grade background).*

Four years ago I came to the U.S. I started school between fall and winter. My first day at school was terrible. A lot of American kids tease me and fight with me. I don't know how to read or write or do math. Everyone calls me dumb. Even teacher got so mad because I don't understand and cannot write (18 year old female with 2nd grade background).

One student who transferred to the local ESL/Bilingual program second semester is a twelfth grader who had two years of school in Vietnam and is entering his fourth year of school in the U.S. He had been in the metropolitan school which, upon arrival in the U.S., had placed him in seventh grade because of his age even though his education was not even up to second grade level. He transferred when he faced having to take the competency exams which he was unable to pass to graduate.

Most of these students are at risk for dropping out of school because of the overwhelming and seemingly impossible task of simultaneously learning high school

material while learning English. Because the Vietnamese place such a high value on education, many Vietnamese teens are sensitive to failure, and thus at risk for dropping out and finding maladaptive ways of coping. In school #3 five of the Amerasians (male and female) have, at different periods of time, dropped out of school. A major challenge of the local ESL/Bilingual program is trying to find ways to keep these students in school and, if they do drop out, of encouraging and helping them to return.

Socializing these students to a classroom environment is another challenge. Their limited attention spans require an enormous amount of energy from the teacher. They lack motivation and discipline to work on individual lessons. They frequently interrupt the teacher when she's teaching a class lesson by talking outloud to one another in Vietnamese and ignoring her reprimands to stop talking and to listen. They get up and leave school in mid-morning when they are bored, tired or want to smoke. They fail to return after breaks. They come into class and lay on the floor, tables or two chairs and go to sleep instead of working. They have no concept of appropriate test taking behavior. They copy from one another's paper openly, ask questions outloud to one another, and bombard the Vietnamese paraprofessional to help them and give them the answers.

At school #3 the teacher gave the students a vocabulary test. One of the Amerasian students turned his

paper in after having copied from another student. The teacher would not accept the test and told him he had to do the test on his own. He exploded and called her a m___ f___. The teacher also took the unfinished papers of those who were talking outloud and helping one another. She later gave them back to have them finish them without help. Another male Amerasian student responded by ripping his test in half. The others completed the test, but not alone and not silently (Field notes, December 18, 1990).

Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities is another contributing factor to academic problems manifested by some of the students in this study. While most are not easily diagnosed due to cultural bias, there are signs that make a strong case for certain disabilities in specific students when compared to their own peers. For example, one of the Amerasian students (18 year old male) manifested mental and physical hyperactivity, inability to concentrate on another person talking, ceaseless chatter, obnoxious behavior to teachers, classmates, and other students in the building, physical tics and habits such as whistling during class, tapping/drumming pencil, and poking other students. He also tends to be controlling, dominating, and the leader of the group.

This student was labeled as mentally slow in his records, but the teachers and paraprofessionals do not think this is accurate. They note that he is mentally quick and his verbal English is much better than the other students. He retains oral information well and has learned English vocabulary very quickly. His mental quickness and sense of humor was noted one day when, during ESL, the

class came across a word they didn't know --"spat." The teacher explained that a spat is when you have a little argument. This student responded with, "Teacher, you and I have a spat every day."

Unfortunately this student was such a distraction and behavior problem in class, that, when he dropped out of school, the teachers and students were relieved. He returned recently, after several months absence during which he had attended and dropped out of two other schools. He was finally given a thorough evaluation. The diagnosis was Attention Deficit Disorder (A.D.D), and he was put on medication. The teacher, who was concerned about his returning to the class, has expressed surprise in how much better he is since being on the medication -- cooperative, pleasant, and self-controlled.

Another student (18 year old male) manifested a speech impediment in his own language and displays those same impediments in speaking English. The researcher had some interaction with the student at school #3 and noted that when he tried to mimic an English word it often came out with little or no resemblance to the original sounds. On many occasions this student would try to communicate with the researcher in English, but most of the times the words were unintelligible, requiring a great deal of effort and energy on both sides. Sometimes he would repeat a word over and over to try to make himself understood.

The researcher worked with one of the male students today. He is very difficult to understand and so the tutoring centered around pronouncing the words more understandably. The researcher would read a word and have this student mimic her. Initially the words came out just as garbled. At one point the researcher encouraged him to look at her when she spoke the word. He did and the difference was remarkable. It seemed that when he watched her form the syllables, he was able to repeat the words in a way that could be understood. When he simply used his ears, the words came out in a form that didn't even resemble the sounds. The problems this student manifests are distinct from those of the other students which tend to be problems with distinguishing certain consonants, especially consonant endings. In contrast, this student has problems distinguishing all the sounds of the word. These observations were shared with the teacher who stated that this student may be manifesting an auditory disability (Field notes, February 16, 1990).

Another student (18 year old male) manifested episodes of abnormal behavior which seemed to be interfering with his learning and academic work. Two of these observations are as follows:

At school #3 one of the male students was working on math with the paraprofessional. At one point his movements froze and he stared blankly at the table. The paraprofessional nudged him and scolded him for not paying attention, but he seemed unaware as if he wasn't there. After a minute or so he seemed to "waken" with a confused look on his face and resumed his work. Later he walked up to the teacher's desk, stopped and stood staring for a minute or so. Then looked around with a confused look on his face and walked back to his seat (Field notes, January 23, 1990).

During observation at school #3, one of the male students got up from his seat with his pencil in his hand and walked toward the pencil sharpener. He seemed to get lost and walked past the pencil sharpener and into the closed door, face first. He staggered then seemed to snap out of it, looked around with a confused look and walked back to his seat, unsharpened pencil still in hand.

The researcher shared this observation and other

similar observations with the teacher. The teacher expressed surprise by the observations. She shared that the student was diagnosed as epileptic, the result of a head injury suffered when he was a boy in Vietnam. He was supposedly on medication to control the seizures, but he must be either not taking the medication or is not on the right dose (Field notes, February 9, 1990).

Petty Theft

One student has displayed a compulsion for petty theft and has been observed in the act on multiple occasions.

One of the male students at school #3 was lingering by the school store, handling everything in sight. After a couple minutes he casually slipped a music cassette into his back pocket and at the same time looked up and caught the researcher's eye. He smiled and winked. He continued standing around as if nothing had occurred (Field notes, January 26, 1990).

This student has also been observed taking things from his teacher's desk and has also stolen bus tickets. On a few occasions the teacher confronted him. He simply smiled and handed the item back. His teacher has expressed concern that his thefts are compulsive behavior that could result in jail if he does the same thing outside of school. Theft was no doubt one of his ways of surviving in Vietnam.

Substance Abuse

Substance abuse is a major problem among the Amerasian students at school #3. A few frequently come to school on Mondays with a hangover. Hand in hand with drinking is drugs. Several of the males indicated on the surveys that they go to the mall for "reefers" when they are feeling

sad. A few have been impaired by drugs during class.

At school #3 one of the male Amerasian students came in to class, red-faced, hyper and thought disordered. It was obvious that the student was high on something. The teacher dealt with it openly and triggered a discussion about substance abuse. Most of the males admitted drinking and smoking marijuana. When asked why they drink and use drugs one of the students said, "Because I feel so sad. It helps to take away the sadness" (Field notes, March 14, 1990).

Aggressive and Dangerous Behavior

Aggression is frequently seen in these students.

Fighting seems to easily erupt from teasing or even from playful interaction getting out of control as the following examples show.

Two of the Amerasian students (a female and a male) began bantering with one another in class just before break. At one point the female student told the male student that his hair looked like a broom. He combs it so that his bangs stand up about five inches in front. He retaliated by saying that her hair looked like a rat's nest. At this point the bantering began to get out of hand as their smiling and laughing turned into tense faces. She began talking louder and talking rapidly. At one point he said something and walked out the door. She started yelling at him and got up and confronted him in the hall, coming at him with her fists. One of the other female Amerasians reached out and held her to keep her from hitting. He sat on the floor while she leaned toward him, red faced and yelling while being restrained. The Vietnamese paraprofessional came and dispersed the gathering group and separated the two students (Field notes, February 20, 1990).

During the morning break at school #3, one of the students (18 year old male) refused to give a cigarette to another student (15 year old male), something he had been doing for the past couple weeks. A fist fight broke out during which the 18 year old took off his artificial leg and began using it as a weapon, hitting the 15 year old with it. The 15 year old, who was new at the school and did not know about

the artificial leg, was terrified when he saw the leg come off. The fight was broken up by the staff, following which the 15 year old burst into tears (Field notes, March 2, 1990)

Aggression has also been manifested in verbal threats. One of the students seemed to hold the class in hostage through verbal threats. He would threaten students to do things for him or to be cohorts in disrupting the class. One student stated that he had to listen to this student and do whatever he said or else he would get beaten up. The verbal threats of being beaten up were also aimed at the Vietnamese paraprofessionals. The situation was only resolved when the student left the school.

Fighting and threatening/dangerous behavior have been major problems among the recently arrived Amerasians. The following are a few examples from school #3.

When the male class members returned from lunch at 12:40, an 18 year old male and a 17 year old male were arguing across the table in Vietnamese. The bilingual paraprofessional said that the 18 year old was angry because the 17 year old was ridiculing his "broken" leg (amputated leg). At one point the 17 year old came around the table and he and the 18 year old began fighting, hitting each other with chairs and throwing them. The teacher and another student tried to break up the fight and became injured in the process. The student's caseworkers were called and the two students were suspended (Field notes, December 18, 1990).

At break time, at school #3, two male students were sitting at one of the tables. One of them threw a cigarette butt at the 17 year old who had been making fun of the artificial leg of one of the students yesterday. The 17 year old became angry and confronted them. The two students beat up the 17 year old, bruising his face, blackening his eyes, and giving him a bloody nose (Field notes, December 19, 1990)

In the morning at school #3, four Vietnamese males who do not attend this school entered the building looking for the two students who had beaten up the 17 year old. They found only one who was alone in the class. They attacked him and beat him up and left the building. The student was taken to the Med station. He had a cut over his eye which required stitches. The police and caseworker were notified and came to discuss the incident. The student "forgot" who the young men were who attacked him and no charges were pressed (Field notes, December 22, 1989).

At 8:40 AM one of the students (18 year old male) who had been suspended, entered the classroom with a pistol held up in each hand. He put one of the pistols up to the head of another student and held the other pistol up. The students were dead silent. The teacher tried to deal with the situation calmly, telling him guns were not allowed in school and that he needed to leave them in the supervisor's office for the day. He said, "NO!" The teacher left to consult with the supervisor. She returned and told him to put the guns on the counter or they would call the police. He said, "NO! Call the police! Get out of here!" The teacher left to tell the supervisor to call the police. They also called the caseworker who arrived before the police and talked the student into giving up the guns (Field notes, January 9, 1990)

Family Violence

Family violence is another problem manifested by some of the Amerasians in this program. Generally, they are victims though one male student attacked his foster father with a knife, and another male student sexually abused a foster sister.

Family violence becomes a problem in the classroom both indirectly and directly.

In the morning at school #3, one of the female students was told she had a phone call. She went to the supervisor's office which is adjacent to the classroom. After a minute or so she began crying loudly and sounded terrified. The teacher went in and put her hand on her shoulder while the student con-

tinued talking and crying on the phone. After the phone call she went back into class. The other students wanted to know what happened. She eventually told them that her mother was angry at her because she had put a scratch on the car and that her mother had said she would be waiting for her with a knife. When questioned further, she shared that her mother has thrown knives at her before and frequently beats her, often with coat hangers. This will occur, for example, if she doesn't get home right on time. She is kept a virtual prisoner in the home, not allowed to go out except to school. She wasn't even allowed to go to any of the Tet celebrations in the schools.

T: What would you do if your mother attacked you with a knife?

S: Nothing. I'm a child. Children have to take it.

T: But what if she tried to kill you?

S: I'd let her.

T: (looked surprised and worried) You wouldn't even try to protect yourself?

S: You don't understand. Our culture is different than American. I have to take it. That's just the way it is.

The teacher told her that she doesn't have to take it in America. She shared options with the student, such as calling protective services, getting out of the home on independent living or emancipation. The student expressed interest in the option of independent living/emancipation but stated that she is not "ready" to take that step. She promised to call the teacher if she ever needed help.

This incident prompted a class discussion on family abuse. The Amerasian females in the class all revealed that they too have been the object of beatings. One of the Amerasians stated that she was beaten by her foster family in Vietnam, and that it continued in the States until she learned, during a support group meeting for Amerasians, that, in America, you don't have to take abuse. She said that ever since then she won't let her foster sister beat her. She tells her sister, "This is America. You can't do this to me" (Field notes, February 23, 1990).

Suicide

Two of the female students at school #3 attempted suicide this semester. Both had been manifesting

depression, but the suicide attempts seemed to be triggered by rejection.

A female student at school #3 came to school looking haggard and depressed, more than usual. The paraprofessional shared that the student's boyfriend had broken up with her and that she had been calling him all weekend, threatening suicide (Field notes, February 26, 1990).

During the morning break at school #3, the female student who had been so depressed yesterday was observed to pour a bottle of pills in a cup. The paraprofessional went over to the teacher and told her of the situation. At that moment the teacher looked up to see the student with her cheeks full. They went over and saw the cup of pills was empty. When asked if she had taken them, she denied it. The supervisor took the girl into her office and questioned her. One of the other female students hesitantly admitted that she had seen the girl take the pills. The supervisor took the student to the hospital. When the mother was called, she responded with "I hope she dies" (Field notes, February 27, 1990).

One of the female students did not show up to class. The teacher shared that she had attempted suicide over the weekend by taking a bottle of pills. Apparently the student had told her caseworker and her foster family that she was going to marry her boyfriend. They told her that was impossible because her "boyfriend" was a female not a male. According to the caseworker and family, this student really believes this other person is a male. The caseworker and family know this other person and state that the boyfriend is an older female Amerasian (Field notes, April 2, 1990).

Strengths and Vulnerabilities

It is important not to let the problems of these students totally overshadow their positive qualities and strengths. In general, Amerasians seem to bring a number of strengths with them to the resettlement experience. They have remarkable survival skills and are generally not as dependent as other refugees (Lutheran Social Services,

1985). They tend to be more open and say how they feel. Because of this they tend to do better in counseling. Most have a strong orientation to work.

A number of vulnerabilities have already been noted. Other vulnerabilities include unrealistic expectations (Lutheran Social Services, 1985), more impulsive and streetwise than other Vietnamese, and become bored easily. Most Amerasians suffered from malnutrition and it is difficult to ascertain their correct ages (United States Catholic Conference, 1985). They also seem to have skipped some stages of development which they may revert to later (Felsman, 1988). They seem to need a great deal of love along with discipline.

Another area of vulnerability has to do with identity development/identity confusion. Since, in Vietnam, an individual's identity is derived from the father, to be without a father robs the Amerasian of a solid sense of self (Lutheran Social Services, 1989). Most Amerasians, consciously or unconsciously, are father-seeking (Gilzow, 1989). Some come to the U.S. with information about their father and with expectation of reunion. They may pursue contacting the father. This was observed in one of the male students at school #3.

During a group discussion about Vietnam, one of the male students kept bringing up his biological father whom he had never met. He stated that he has a picture of his father, "a handsome 19-year-old from Ohio." He has put his father's picture in the newspapers in hopes of finding him (Dec. 20, 1990).

Stress may come from the tension between cultural distance and yet yearning to be American. One student put it this way.

I have been in America for four years. I wish that someday I can be a real American (17 year old female).

The issue of self-identity was perhaps most clearly portrayed in two self-portraits. For example, two students in this study drew a picture of themselves in school. The first drawing (Figure 33) was drawn by an ethnic Vietnamese. His self-portrait shows a definite Asian identity. The second drawing (Figure 34) was drawn by an Amerasian, showing an Anglo-American identity.

Summary

The Amerasians in this study grew up under government, community and, in some cases, family discrimination and abuse. They were punished for being "half-breeds" of the enemy. They experienced early parental loss of father and, in most cases, of mother as well. Some of the mothers reappeared in the Amerasians life to register to leave the country. Most had to wait about five years to come to the U.S. once they were registered. During that time the Amerasian and his/her family were not allowed to legally work or go to school.

Upon arrival in the U.S. most continued to be objects of abuse in the family and from others in the Vietnamese



Fig. 33: Asian Identity



this is me in school

Fig. 34: Anglo-American Identity

community. The recently arrived Amerasians presented the greatest challenges in the classroom. Problems involved lack of previous education, aggressive and oppositional behavior, mental and physical disabilities, dangerous fighting and threatening behavior in the classroom, substance abuse, family problems, and suicide.

They seem to manifest a number of vulnerabilities in the U.S., such as being father-seeking, impulsive, street-wise, easily bored, and with a low self-esteem. They also seem to have a number of strengths, such as good survival skills, open with their feelings, and a strong orientation for work.

Chapter 10

OVERVIEW, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This was an ethnographic study of 36 adolescent Vietnamese refugee students in a West Michigan ESL/Bilingual Program. The need for such a study was based on preliminary inquiries regarding the assessment of refugee students in area schools which revealed a limited focus: English language proficiency, reading comprehension, and math skills. A void was noted regarding other key areas which could impact academic performance and successful adaptation. Since adolescence is considered to be an especially critical period of development and since there was a high percentage of Vietnamese students in the program, adolescent Vietnamese were chosen as the focus group.

The study was developed with the following purposes in mind: 1) to explore and describe background experiences and current situations of this group of adolescent Vietnamese, focusing on pre-migration, migration, and post-migration factors, and 2) to explore the use of methods which may contribute to a holistic understanding of Vietnamese students by school personnel.

The study was designed within a tripartite theoretical framework: the Ecological Model, Developmental Theory, and Symbolic Interaction Theory. Multiple methods

of data collection were utilized, namely participant observation, surveys, and life histories.

Due to the nature of the study, findings were divided into historical periods of the students' lives starting with their growing up years in Vietnam, their experiences in leaving Vietnam, their waiting period in refugee camps, and their experiences in the U.S. The students in this study grew up in the north, south, and central regions of Vietnam. Though there are some differences from region to region, all were raised in a culture which, traditionally, emphasizes Confucian values and ethics. However, with the war and postwar environments, there has been a gradual erosion of some of these teachings.

While these young people had a wide range of backgrounds, most experienced some form of hardship due to war and post-war environments. These hardships included father absent homes, mothers entering the work force, extreme poverty and near starvation, and denial of education. The Amerasians had additional hardships which revolved around discrimination and abuse for being "half-breeds" of the enemy.

The decision to leave Vietnam was made mostly by the parents or older family members of the youths and with one or more of the following reasons: for a better future, for freedom, for a chance to get an education, to escape communism, to avoid induction into the army, to escape poverty and hunger, to reunite with family in the U.S., to

serve as a sponsor for other family members. Most escaped Vietnam secretly by boat. Though their experiences were varied, there were common patterns: they had to pay money, they left family and friends behind, they faced the consequences of jail or even death if caught by the Vietnamese police or soldiers, they faced extreme danger from natural disaster to starvation to robbing, raping, and/or murder by Thai or Malay pirates.

Those who escaped by boat spent time in refugee camps in Malaysia, Thailand, or Hong Kong. They lived in conditions ranging from difficult to dangerous. The amount of time they spent in these camps varied, ranging from one month to three and one half years. Some who had the opportunity in the camp to go to school took advantage of it. Others were too preoccupied with subsisting and/or lacked motivation to go to school. Once accepted for resettlement, most had high and unrealistic expectations of life in the U.S. They expected life to be rich, free, and fun.

Upon arrival in the U.S. these young people face incredible challenges to successful adaptation. Problems with cultural distance, culture shock, and loss of linguistic competencies are handicapping factors. Most depend on the ESL/Bilingual classes as a bridge to mainstream classes and society. Common coping styles to the multiple losses and stressors they face include working hard, clustering with own language group, listening to music, withdrawal

behaviors, and swearing. Problems manifested in the ESL classes included racial/ethnic tension, depression and anger, disobedience and disrespect, and substance abuse.

Amerasians presented the greatest challenge in the classroom, such as lack of socialization to the classroom, short attention spans, impulsivity and aggression, learning disabilities, dangerous fighting and threatening behavior, family violence, and suicide. They enter the U.S. with a number of vulnerabilities in the U.S., such as being father-seeking, impulsive, streetwise, and having low self-esteem. They also have a number of strengths, such as good survival skills, open with their feelings, and a strong orientation for work.

Discussion

As noted above, this study was developed within the framework of three theoretical orientations. They have been discussed to some extent in the findings. The Ecological Systems Model, which has a holistic perspective and focuses on the properties of state and change in the individual, family, and their environments, provided a framework for gaining a holistic understanding of refugee students and following the changes in their lives. Symbolic Interaction Theory, which emphasizes the role of language and culture and symbols/meanings in forming a foundation for perception and behavior, provided the framework for exploring the cultural aspects these young people bring to this foreign land and the impact of the loss of

some of these cultural and linguistic underpinnings. Developmental Theory, which emphasizes the psychological, biological, and social stages of growth and time specific tasks, provided a framework for exploring the development and current tasks of these young people.

Based on the findings, the three theoretical orientations could be related to each other and combined to provide further understanding, particularly by placing them in the context of human development. Therefore, the following discussion is based on the three theories as they relate to the development of the adolescent refugee.

Adolescence, with all its emotional, physical, social, and cognitive upheavals, makes no exception of the refugee youth. Even for children developing under essentially normal conditions, the stressors accompanying adolescence have sometimes proven unmanageable, requiring professional help and guidance through the process. The refugee youth must not only face the multiple developmental hurdles confronting any growing child, but must also struggle to maintain some semblance of equilibrium in the face of the stressors confronting all refugees: biographical upheaval, loss of loved ones, and loss of linguistic and social competencies (Ben-Porath, 1987; Paul, 1986; Stein, 1986).

The passage from childhood to adulthood and the psychological resolution, or lack of resolution, of that passage can only be understood in the context of the cultural and background experiences that encompass them

(Irwin & Madden, 1986; Nidorf, 1985). Southeast Asian adolescents have most likely grown up in conditions of ongoing stress and, in some cases, violence. The escape experience itself has often been traumatic and extremely stressful. These experiences may be exacerbated by the interactions between these stressed and traumatized children and their stressed and traumatized parents and/or significant other adults (Carlin, 1979). They come from different socio-economic, ethnic, religious, and educational backgrounds, but they all have fled from the effects of the same war which divided the country to which they have come.

The adolescent who has had the chance to develop a basic sense of trust and autonomy will be able to deal with the critical tasks of adolescence from a foundation of strength (Erickson, 1963). This foundation should enable the adolescent to emerge from the process with an individuated ego, a strong identity, and resolved sexual complexes.

Refugee youths from Southeast Asia may not have had the chance to develop this strong foundation (Nidorf, 1985). Many had to deal with the critical stages of trust versus mistrust and autonomy versus shame during periods of trauma, illness, and family upheaval or dissolution. These stressors can disrupt mastery of developmental tasks which may be manifested in learning delays or regression. If unrecognized and untreated the result can be permanent disabilities (Carlin, 1986).

It may be from such a disrupted developmental foundation that many of these youths now face the adolescent tasks of separation, identity formation, and sexuality -- and all this during another period of trauma, illness, and upheaval. This may place them at risk for further developmental disruption.

Separation and Individuation

Issues surrounding the tasks of separation and individuation may be threatening issues for refugee adolescents and their families. These tasks are likely to reawaken memories of previous separations. Separation is at the core of the refugee experience, for to be a refugee is to be separated from everything that is familiar and dear -- family, a social network, a climate, a land, a culture, a nation, a way of life.

Problems with attachment and separation may be manifested by unaccompanied minors, particularly those placed in foster care. The majority have endured premature and sometimes traumatic separations from their families, both in their early years, e.g., fathers and mothers who were killed or put in jail, and in their recent separation experiences in leaving Vietnam. The foster home for the Southeast Asian refugee can become the focus for the projection of internal conflict around attachment and separation (Nidorf, 1985). This may be manifested by the adolescent becoming manipulative, critical, and demanding constant changes in foster home placement. The resulting

environmental turmoil may further impede the working through of the developmental tasks of adolescence. Some of these youths may be unable to let themselves feel a part of the foster family because they fear they would be disloyal to their own family.

Some unaccompanied minors were sent by families that could not or would not escape themselves. Many were spirited away in the middle of the night with no preparation, perhaps for their own protection. Some were tricked into leaving. Many did not realize they were making a permanent separation from their parents. Some do not want to be here. Unwanted migration can lead to chronic grieving, anger, resentment, depression and disability, or patterns of antisocial behavior (Nidorf, 1985).

For those refugee adolescents who have been able to experience the security and caring they need from foster parents, problems with separation may be manifested when they turn 18 or when they complete school. This is the time when they become legally emancipated, meaning that the foster home is no longer reimbursed for their care. They are *entirely* on their own since foster children typically do not have the privilege that biological children have -- being able to move back home if they cannot make it independently. For the Southeast Asian refugee adolescent, the pain and anxiety that originated with previous separations may be revived as leaving a family and a home resembles the experience of being forced to leave his or



her original family and country.

Some foster children may manifest separation difficulties through dependent behaviors. For example, some Amerasians, probably due to earlier deprivations, may have times where they are needy and clingy. Other youths may display difficulty making their own decisions.

"Freedom," especially freedom to make decisions for one's life, can be frightening to youths who have grown up in a family and society which controlled their lives and made decisions for them. Many foster children in their middle or late teens have not had the experience of making their own decisions.

Problems with separation and individuation may also revolve around the family left back in Vietnam or Cambodia. Many unaccompanied minors feel the pressure and responsibility of being their family's only hope for the future, such as sending money and medicine and sponsoring them. Nidorf (1985) stated that the burdens on these young people are made heavier by conflictual feelings such as fear of failing and disappointing the family versus resentment at having been abandoned and unprotected. She further noted that the intense pressures on these youths are sometimes the major precipitates for more serious pathology.

Some of these youths may be unable to separate themselves from their family's hardships and suffering, resulting in an inability to move forward with their own lives (Carlin, 1986). They may feel guilty about being



well fed and clothed. To be happy and enjoy life while their parents, grandparents, and siblings suffer can be extremely difficult for them. Unless these issues are addressed, they may choose to deny themselves.

The tasks of separation and individuation may be harder for Southeast Asians than for other refugee groups (Tobin & Friedman, 1984). They come from cultures where adult children do not typically move away from home or break from their parents. Their culture is built on Eastern values which are, in many ways, diametrically opposed to the Western values of American life. The tasks of separation and individuation are molded from a Western orientation which values and encourages independence and autonomy. For the Southeast Asian, there is no stage in life for "separation and individuation." Interdependence and obedience are valued and encouraged throughout the life-cycle. Independence and autonomy are discouraged. Because of this, Southeast Asian adolescents may be prone to doubts, guilt, and feelings of rejection concerning separation issues (Nidorf, 1985).

For those living with their families, this culture clash seems to put Asian adolescents in an impossible bind. They are pressured by family to be successful in the U.S. society. But when they begin to show signs of independence and self-determination, which are necessary characteristics for success in America, they tend to encounter parental disapproval and opposition (Lin, 1986). They are pressured

to succeed, yet pressured not to become "American" in the process. The result may be intergenerational conflict, as well as internal conflict within themselves. They end up caught between potential alienation from family or potential alienation from their American peers and society. Either choice means alienation from and denial of a part of themselves.

Psycho-Sexual Development

According to psychoanalytic theory, the increase in sexual energy which accompanies puberty creates a disequilibrium in the balance of the ego and id (Freud, 1966). This requires a reworking of previously dormant sexual complexes. For many refugee adolescents this disequilibrium may be augmented by disturbing and traumatic sexual experiences and by the experience of being a refugee (Tobin & Friedman, 1984).

Many Southeast Asian refugee youths have had serious discontinuities in their health care. They are likely to be carrying tuberculosis, hepatitis, parasites, and other infections that result in chronic nutritional insufficiencies (Carlin, 1986; Peck et al., 1981). The more recently arrived refugees seem to have more health and nutritional related problems than those who arrived earlier (Krenner & Sabin, 1985). Many have suffered from chronic malnutrition, and some have had periods of starvation. These factors in combination with excessive stress may result in growth stunting, delayed puberty, and other syndromes, such

as cessation of the menstrual cycle. After a year or two in the U.S., they seem to begin to catch up with sudden growth spurts (Peck et al., 1981).

Older adolescent refugees may arrive in the United States without experience or guidance in dating. They are often shocked when they see the common sexual behaviors of holding hands and kissing since they come from cultures which forbid touching the opposite sex in public. Without a well defined family structure to guide them, some unaccompanied minors are enticed into premarital sex -- a behavior they may consider wrongful and shameful (Nidorf, 1985). They may feel they have "lost face" and have dishonored and shamed their parents. They may seek to resolve this through a culturally acceptable means -- suicide.

Some unaccompanied minors and Amerasians had been street children. Street behaviors, such as stealing and fighting, may present problems in the U.S. Some girls had to resort to prostitution as a way to survive (Lutheran Social Services, 1985; Nidorf, 1985). Upon resettlement they may continue these behaviors, attempting to be seductive as a way of obtaining money, favors, or "love." Some, are at risk because of emotional and physical deprivation of their earlier years. They may carry deep needs for love and belongingness which may result in sexual promiscuity. The attitude of some Vietnamese males is that all Amerasian girls are promiscuous, usually stated in degrading terms (Lutheran Social Services, 1985). In addition, some

Amerasians may experience confusion in their identity which can also extend to their sexual identity.

The most profound impact on the Southeast Asian refugee girl's psychosexual development is most likely to be experiences of molestation or rape (Nidorf, 1985). Many women and girls are raped by pirates in the escape or in refugee camps. Some girls are sold to slave brothels which even operate within the Thai refugee camps (Biagini, 1989).

The deep wounds from such horror and shame, take their toll on these young women. Some may be suicidal, withdrawn, removed from social relationships, and resistant to the cultural expectations of marriage (Nidorf, 1985). Others may react by identifying with their aggressors by becoming sexually promiscuous. Further trauma may occur after resettlement. Sexual molestation has occurred as a result of sponsors who were not properly screened. Abuse has also occurred when families take male boarders into their already cramped quarters (Westermeyer, 1986b).

Some of the males had to watch the victimization of their sisters, mothers, and aunts (Nidorf, 1985). Some were victims of torture. The psychic energy used to repress these events and the emotions of fear, shame, and rage can render them impotent both physically and psychologically. They may be phobic, apathetic, tentative about their capabilities, obsessional, and anxiety ridden.

As noted earlier, the roles and interactions across generations frequently are disturbed in refugee families.

Included in this is a disruption in the traditional sex roles. For example, husbands may have more difficulty finding jobs than their wives and often have to rely on them to support the family (Stein, 1986). Traditional sex roles are also impacted by the fact that a whole generation of Southeast Asian men are scarred by the trauma of combat, loss, and, perhaps, by feelings of guilt for their failure to protect their countries from annexation and annihilation (Tobin & Friedman, 1984). They may feel they are too old to begin their life again and regain the respect needed to serve their traditional role as family patriarch.

Such circumstances may be detrimental to the psychosexual development of the adolescent male (Tobin & Friedman, 1984). He may perceive his father as defeated, ineffectual, and embittered, not the object of competition and identification which is usually needed to resolve Oedipal complexes. As a result the adolescent male may consciously or unconsciously blame or pity his father.

Identity Formation

"Identity formation neither begins nor ends with adolescence: It is a lifelong development" (Erickson, 1963, p. 11). Generally one emerges from childhood with a tentative sense of coherence of one's self and one's world (Antonovsky, 1979). This "tentativeness" begins to be transformed into "definitiveness" in adolescence, the crucial stage for identity formation (Erickson, 1968). The concept of identity includes the implicit expectation that

the young person brings together his or her life experience with the values of a specific culture. But what happens when nomic disruption occurs during this stage? For the refugee youth, there is a loss of the cultural givens that provide, in part, the underpinnings of the usual adolescent identity formation (Nidorf, 1985). Instead of continuity, there is discontinuity, a lack of stable and familiar environments most adolescents can count on in their quest for a sense of self, an identity.

The escape experience may be the point when the refugee youth's perceptions of self, others, and the universe were turned upside down (Nidorf, 1985). They may suddenly realize that life is dangerous, that one cannot always protect oneself, and that one cannot trust others. It is this experience which cause some to lose faith in the adult world when they see adults unwilling or unable to help. They may experience what Keller (1975) describes as "a sudden awareness that the most chilling fear of childhood, of being abandoned by caretakers and being helpless in attempting to preserve one's wellbeing and satisfy one's own needs, has actually come true" (p. 47).

Perhaps this loss of faith in adults is one of the factors behind one study's findings that Vietnamese are more likely to belong to gangs than other minority and white students (Rumbaut, 1985). It may be that many find it more comfortable to bond with peers than to relate to adults in primary relationships. Unaccompanied minors seem

to be at a higher risk for gang activity than other Vietnamese refugee youths. Besides the possible loss of faith in adults during migration experiences, the youths have been on their own in refugee camps and some were street children in Vietnam who may have fended for themselves since the age of six or seven. They may have learned in their formative years, through Communist indoctrination and experience, to rely on peer groups as a survival mechanism. Some formed gangs in refugee camps, preying on other refugees (Biagini, 1989). Perhaps they have placed their faith in strong peer group affiliations as a means of protecting themselves and their futures.

Southeast Asian refugee youths may struggle with identity confusion because of the extreme cultural distance and disparity between their prior backgrounds and their present circumstances. They have been dubbed the "1.5 generation" (Ranard, 1989). They don't belong to either the first generation of their parents nor the second generation of children born in the United States. In a sense they are a bridge between two disparate cultures. They live in two worlds with two sets of languages, rules, expectations, and customs.

In many respects they may actually be considered within the context of four cultural systems that are in constant interaction with one another: the Southeast Asian, particularly a specific ethnic group, the American, the refugee, and the adolescent in a rapidly changing society.

This creates a great deal of stress for these young people who are put in a position that demands considerable tolerance for ambiguity and contradiction, while, at the same time, trying to form a unified sense of self and of their place in this world.

Southeast Asian youths must also work through the identity problems of being Asian in America. Because of the extreme unpopularity and lack of understanding of the Vietnam War, identity conflict may be made even more acute for Southeast Asian adolescents, such as encountering hostility by some Americans and being taught versions of the war that are disparate from their experience or from what they were told by family. On top of this, some may have been taught to hate Americans through anti-American propaganda in school or from family who believed that the U.S. had escalated what was supposed to be a civil war and then deserted their country, causing their people to lose the war (Carlin, 1986). These feelings and perceptions may create tremendous conflict with identity formation.

Conflicts surrounding identity formation may be manifested by intermittent resistance to American authority and American rules (Nidorf, 1985). This includes limit testing which usually involves ignoring rules that had been previously understood, refusing to stop some activities when told to stop, and instigating fights with peers. Some may fight to prove that they are not "American" and/or to keep from turning into an American (Carlin, 1986).

Refugee adolescents are often caught in a double-bind between pressures toward accelerated acculturation by teachers and peers and pressures toward maintaining their cultural values and identity by family. They have several alternative strategies to deal with these conflicts:

1. Over-Acculturation in which they look to the American popular culture for role models, discarding or disguising their ethnic background to the astonishment of their parents (Lin, 1986; Tobin & Friedman, 1984).

2. Under-Acculturation in which they so strongly identify with their parents and their ethnic culture that they form an identity that may not be suited to modern American life (Tobin & Friedman, 1984).

3. Alienation in which they form no identifications with either culture. They may "prefer to be nothing, and that totally, rather than remain a contradictory bundle of identity fragments" (Erickson, 1968, p. 88). The greatest threat to the refugee youth's identity may not be the feeling of belonging to two or more cultures, but feeling of belonging to none (Keniston, 1960). The result is perplexity, self-fragmentation, and confusion.

4. Biculturation in which they construct a bicultural identity by selecting from the divergent cultures those values and beliefs that will facilitate existence -- a series of partial identifications (Ben-Porath, 1987; Nidorf, 1985; Tobin & Friedman, 1984)

Refugee adolescents who live with their own families

often look to their parents first in their search of identity (Tobin & Friedman, 1984). But the parents may be feeling more helpless and estranged than the youth, thus offering little guidance. The parents are often preoccupied with their own struggles, resulting in their being emotionally unavailable (Nidorf, 1985).

In addition, Southeast Asian parents tend to be unaware of and unsympathetic to the difficulties of adolescent identity struggles in America because they come from cultures of high continuity (Biagini, 1989; Tobin & Friedman, 1984). In their culture the adolescent may move from childhood to adulthood with little apparent stress. In some cases there may be no stage of adolescence as the child moves into the expected adult roles of work at very young ages. They also enter marriage at younger ages than their American counterparts.

The immense cultural distance between the Southeast Asian and American cultures creates a context in which the Southeast Asian parents may appear to be anachronistic and out of touch to their children (Berry, 1986). These parents may have trouble finding jobs and learning English and, thus, may depend on their child to be an interpreter and culture broker. The child may actually become the most capable person in the family, while the elders are likely to display marginal maladaptive patterns of adjustment (Stein, 1979). These factors can disrupt the role relationships within the family and create a context in which



parents are unable to provide appropriate and useful role models for forming socio-cultural identities.

Amerasian adolescent refugees may be more confused than other refugee youths concerning issues of ethnic identity and belongingness (Ben-Porath, 1987; United States Catholic Conference, 1985). They may suffer from a poor self-image, making identity formation even more difficult. Their perceptions of self and identity are impacted by a number of negative experiences: 1) discrimination and prejudice in Vietnam, 2) prejudice in the refugee camps and in the U.S. by other Vietnamese refugees, 3) sometimes becoming the objects of anger from mothers and other family members who blame the Amerasian for the depression and isolation the family may feel in resettlement, 4) prejudice from Americans in the U.S. (Lutheran Social Services, 1985).

Some Amerasians may have psychological problems coping with their mixed race (Biagini, 1989; Gilzow, 1989). This is especially true if they are half black. Identity problems for black Amerasians are more complex than for others. One of the difficulties lies in the fact that Vietnamese are fearful of anyone black, an attitude that is buried in the history of Vietnam when African mercenaries who were employed by the French perpetrated atrocities on the Vietnamese people (United States Catholic Conference, 1985). The stories that have been passed down through the generations are based partly on fact, partly on myth, and a



great deal on misinformation. But they serve, nonetheless, to create a fear of anyone black.

When in Vietnam, black Amerasians tend to think of themselves as American-Vietnamese, not as black Amerasians (Gilzow, 1989). Upon arrival in the U.S. this thought process reverses, and they see themselves as Vietnamese-American. They find it difficult to accept that they are black, such as the often heard statement, "I'm not black, I'm ugly" (Gilzow, 1989). They may reject black foster parents while at the same time being rejected by other Vietnamese refugees. A thoughtful response to such a conflict was given by a black administrator in St. Paul:

A black Amerasian will spend his/her whole life learning what it is to be black in the U.S. To place them immediately in a black foster family, given their history and the high level of anxiety and stress any unaccompanied adolescent experiences during the first year or two in the U.S., seems inappropriate and premature. First things first. They will learn to be black through osmosis, over time (Lutheran Social Services, 1985, p. 3).

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the guiding research questions and the subsequent findings of this study. The guiding research questions were: 1) What are the background and current situations of these Vietnamese students? and 2) To what extent can multiple research approaches add to understanding the situation of adolescent Vietnamese in U.S. schools?

An ethnographic study of the background and current

situation of this group of adolescent refugees reveals how complex their adaptational and developmental issues are. In their struggles to adjust to the U.S., it is important that they receive supportive help from people who are sensitized to the complexities and varying influences impacting their lives. School counselors, teachers, family service providers, foster parents, refugee parents, and mental and general health providers can make the process of adjustment and the passage to adulthood smoother for these young people by becoming more aware of the adaptational and developmental hurdles confronting them.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Over the past decade or so, there seems to have been noticeable changes in the social and economic environments of the United States. One aspect of these changes has been the large numbers of immigrants and refugees who have been permanently resettled in the United States, thus altering population mixes and increasing ethnic diversity. Because of this reality and the expected continuation of this trend, there is a need for policies and practices that are aimed at promoting cultural pluralism. This needs to be done at all levels. Programs could be developed to foster better understanding between different ethnic groups and receiving communities/societies and to promote mutual respect among culturally diverse people. A culturally pluralistic society would not be a melting pot which forces

on its groups a single view of how the world should be seen and lived, but, instead, would be like a bouquet of flowers blooming in the sun. Minority groups would not have to lose their distinctiveness in order to be respected and appreciated, in order to peacefully coexist with members of the larger society, and in order to contribute and participate fully in the society. This, of course, requires a bicultural balance in which one retains ethnicity to a great degree and, at the same time, is familiar with the host-culture and language.

The need for pluralism at all levels of society is important to education systems since schools which serve an increasing immigrant population cannot work without the support and cooperation of the community and larger society in which they are embedded. Higher education is also an interacting force. In the education and training of future teachers, counselors, and other service providers, there needs to be the inclusion of experiences that will familiarize them with the history and culture of various ethnic groups and that will provide awareness of their own community and family cultures.

At the local community and school levels, the continuous large influx of refugee/immigrant youth and the diversity of their needs demands for increasing available resources, including relevant educational content and comprehensive orientation for these youths to the educational system and society. One way orientation to the



local school may be provided, in part, could be through a handbook put together by the students in the ESL/bilingual program at those schools. This guide could include pictures and captions as well as descriptions of what is expected of a student. These could be translated and given to new students and their families as a bilingual introduction to the school system.

There is a need for a more holistic approach to assessment of refugee and other immigrant youth in the schools. Since many factors besides English proficiency and math skills impact academic performance, it would be valuable to supplement the current assessment tests with questions which give a brief overview of educational, socio-economic, and health history, such as those on the surveys (Appendix B).

Mainstream teachers should be provided with information on cultural adaptation and on the anxiety these students feel in speaking English and the frustration of not being understood when they risk such interaction. In addition, teachers should be provided with some background information on the Limited English Proficient (LEP) students in their classes. The information could be both individualized and group oriented, e.g., socio-cultural information and information of the individual's background which would be helpful in promoting understanding.

Promotion of pluralism is needed within the schools. This should begin with a "desegregation" of the ESL/

Bilingual program in the schools. At the present it seems that these classes and teachers are set apart and even isolated, in some respects, from the rest of the school. This is unfortunate since these teachers and students have much to contribute. The effectiveness of the school system would be positively increased by the integration of the social and cultural systems of all its students within the school's functions and goals.

Perhaps a multi-cultural week/month which focuses on the ethnic diversity and ancestry of all the students would be one step toward promoting pluralism. For example the theme could revolve around "Where We Come From." This could link the history of Native Americans and the first immigrants to the ancestors of the mainstream students to the recent arrivals of LEP students in ESL/Bilingual classes. Perhaps one appropriate context for this would be the Thanksgiving season. Student writings and drawings could be encouraged and displayed.

Communication and cooperation needs to be encouraged between mainstream and ESL/bilingual teachers. It would also be valuable if the ESL/Bilingual program could present in-service workshops for mainstream teachers on what to expect from and how to work with their LEP students. Included in this would be helping the teachers to understand that the struggles of LEP students in their classrooms are more than a language barrier. There is a need for understanding the role culture plays in content,

style, and comprehension. During these workshops it would also be valuable to provide the mainstream teachers with ideas on how they can make content relevant to the LEP students and how they can add a multicultural perspective to their classes.

There is a need to recognize and teach cultural pluralism in the ESL classes and mainstream classes. Teachers need to learn more about the traditions, ideas, and beliefs of their students and to incorporate these in classroom and extracurricular activities. This needs to be more than tasting parties and colorful ethnic costumes and introductions to the odd or unique practices of people from different nations or ethnic groups. There is a need for a culturally sensitive curriculum. In addition, teachers need to instill in them a respect for their ethnic heritage. This can help take the sting out of the problems of separation and identity.

The combination of the life history method with the Language Experience Approach has potential for classroom use. It provides a way for the students to share their experiences and feelings, teaches reading and writing, promotes comprehension by using content that is familiar to the students and based on their first-hand experiences, and provides important information for understanding and getting to know each individual student. Before the students begin writing their autobiographies, it may be helpful to read passages from autobiographies and stories

of others who had experiences they could relate to, such as the following books:

Boning, R. (1975). *Alone*. Baldwin, N.Y.: Dexter & Westbrook.

Fritz, J. (1984). *Homesick: My own story*. New York: Dell.

Huynh, Q. (1982). *The land I lost: Adventures of a boy in Vietnam*. New York: Harper & Row.

Molnar, J. (1973). *A Chinese-American child tells his story*. New York: Watts.

Molnar, J. (1974). *Elizabeth: A Puerto Rican-American child tells her story*. New York: Watts.

Rogers, J. (1983). *Goodbye my island*. New York: Greenwillow.

Takashima. (1971). *A child in a prison camp*. New York: Morrow.

It would be valuable to provide educational opportunities for the refugee/immigrant students to share their cultural and life-history experiences with students in mainstream. It could benefit and enrich the mainstream students as well as provide a bridge to understanding. Such understanding may be one means of reducing stigma and prejudice.

It would be valuable to add an elective social studies class to the curriculum which could be called cultural studies. The focus would be on culture, language, and history of target language groups in the school. For example, if the target language groups are Vietnamese and Spanish, the class would focus on the culture and history

of these two groups and provide an introduction to these two languages, such as explaining what a tonal language is in the case of Vietnamese as well as learning a few phrases. Community members from the language groups could be brought in to enhance the content and provide contact with the ethnic communities in the area. It is important to tap these communities and to develop a cooperative relationship since the ethnic communities can enhance or hinder the efforts of the ESL/Bilingual program.

At the elementary level, it would be valuable to have the ESL and a mainstream teacher join classes once a week for a social studies unit on current topics relating to the countries or culture of the LEP students. Community members from the language group of the LEP students could be brought in.

There is a need for prevention programs developed specifically for refugee youth. Felner (1983) states that prevention programs must be group oriented, directed to those who are at risk for adverse psycho-social outcomes, and must be able to strengthen psycho-social health and skills or reduce maladaptation. Refugee youths need to be made aware of the stages of refugee adaptation. In their adaptation, they need to be guided toward the more adaptive road of biculturation, as opposed to over-aculturation, isolation, or alienation. This can be done, in part, by teaching them to expect and how to cope with differential acculturation in the family. In addition, as a way to

help these young people in their transition from one culture to another, it might be helpful to highlight and focus upon goals and values that are shared between the two cultures. Open discussion regarding culture shock and areas of cultural conflict is also needed.

Educators can also aid in the reduction of stress on these young people by developing policies that are more appropriate to their needs. One way may be to develop a program specifically for refugee/immigrant adolescents who would not be able to meet competency requirements in English by the time of graduation due to inadequate English proficiency and/or lower educational experience in their own language. An option for these students may be to provide a limited special diploma for those who would be unable to meet all the language requirements. For some of the adolescents, particularly those who are older and have limited education, an option would be to have an individualized program which might take them longer to graduate but which could also take them into job training skills. In this type of program they would be able to follow the dual paths of work and study, continuing their education with an extended time period. In such a program there should be specific goals set up with each student so that the student knows when to expect to reach the objectives. The plan should be adjusted each year with the student.

For refugee youths who live with their own families, the unit of service should be predominantly the family.

One important goal would be to reduce the acculturational distance between children and parents. The children have the advantage of school-based relationships and acculturative resources. If these resources could be made available to the parents as well, the acculturational distance, generational conflict, and resulting emotional distress might be reduced.

Many of the students stated that they wished their parents/foster parents could understand how hard school is. They face high expectations. One possible help would be to have the parents sit in on the classes and experience the educational environment of their children. This could open the door to better understanding on the parents' part and could also provide opportunities for the parents to learn as well, thus helping to reduce acculturational distance.

Workshops for the parents of LEP students is needed. These workshops would be aimed at preparing the parents to better assist their children in their education. These workshops might also include information on adaptation that could be helpful in understanding their children's needs and in understanding their own issues. Some of the families may need to be helped to appreciate the importance of education and the gains that will be achieved if they devote the time and energy to preparing for and following through on their children's learning. Some may need to be encouraged to become more involved. Others may need to be encouraged to reduce the level of expectation and stress

they put on their children. For parents who may not come to a workshop, home visits may be appropriate. Home visits might be appropriate for all the ESL students and could be a valuable linking mechanism between home and school. A partnership with parents could be enhanced by a culturally responsive approach. In this approach, attempts would be made to identify and incorporate into the philosophy, methods, and curriculum those aspects of the families' cultures that are central and conducive to learning.

It might be valuable to utilize the life history method, with or without the Language Experience Approach, as an educational, counseling, and/or research tool involving the whole family. All family members could contribute their perspectives on their past experiences and current situations. Parents could contribute aspects of the homeland that the students may have forgotten or not be aware of. This may not only be a valuable educational and research tool, but may promote a bridge across generations and link the past with the present.

There is a need for a school counselor/social worker for refugee/immigrant students. This is most urgent with the new arrivals of unaccompanied minors and Amerasians. Training for those working with refugee youth should be guided by a contextualized theory of development. And, as indicated by other minority groups in the United States, a priority should be on developing staff, professional and paraprofessional, from the youth's own ethnic groups. This

will help to create/maintain some cultural continuity and community that are essential to adjustment, identity formation, and the alleviation of alienation.

Programs need to locate adult Amerasians for Amerasian youth. Neither black staff, Vietnamese staff, nor Caucasian staff can provide an adequate role model for them in their formation of a sense of identity. Also, for black Amerasians, opportunities to interact with other black youths should be considered, but only when the timing is appropriate and the youths are ready for this step in the identity process.

Support groups are advocated for adolescent refugees as a source of primary prevention. Themes could address issues of loss and grief, identity, intergenerational conflict, dating and sexuality, racial discrimination, and the past and present experiences of the members. If these groups are developed as an extension of an educational program, it would be consistent with the cultural value systems of the Southeast Asian families which have high regard for education and respect for academic institutions.

Within this same context, peer support could be encouraged by developing a program in which earlier arrivals tutor the later arrivals. It might also be appropriate to have native born Americans also involved in tutoring. They could tutor in academics, English as well as being a tutor/culture broker of the socio-cultural world of mainstream. Participating mainstream students

could receive credit for community service. Such a program could help reduce clustering behavior and provide a bridge to friendships across cultures.

As the world is moving toward a more interdependent system, teachers need to provide all students with the necessary skills for surviving and succeeding/competing in a global village. Education activities need to be developed to help students build a foundation for international understanding, prepare them to meet and interact with a variety of people, and provide them with wider experiences.

Future Research

There is a need for ongoing research to assist those who work with Limited English Proficient (LEP) students. Such research needs to be approached from a dual perspective: a general and comparative perspective that sees patterns in the LEP students' experience, and a more focused perspective that sees the differences between the various cultural groups as well as individual case studies. The inclusion of families, sponsors, and ethnic and mainstream communities would also be valuable in further research with this population.

Longitudinal studies are also needed. With the students in this study it would be valuable to follow them over five, ten, and even twenty years in order to gain some understanding of their adaptational processes and outcomes



over the life cycle. Such research could be comparative and applicable to other young people in cross-cultural contexts and transitions, such as children and youths whose parents are foreign service workers, missionaries, and international business people.

Research on interventions, methods, and programs with refugee youth and LEP students in general is needed. In order to help these young people, it is important to encourage creative development of programs and methods while adequately evaluating what is needed, what approaches/methods are most effective, and for what populations.

If an ongoing, interactional, and interdependent relationship could exist between research, policy, and practice with refugee youth, a more effective approach to service could be in place for future arrivals. Such an approach could be preventive versus the typical reactionary approach. The reactionary approach is based on the belief that each new wave of immigration/refugeeism is an end in itself. But as history shows, there is no end to the human stream of emigration and immigration which continuously changes the face of the globe. Thus, research, policy, and practice need to modify their focus to meet this reality.



APPENDICES



Appendix A

PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

I give my permission to have _____
participate in the refugee student research study being
conducted by Barbara Dillinger as part of her graduate
program at Michigan State University. I understand that the
study will utilize two surveys (which the students will
complete during class) and student autobiographies. The
focus of the study will be on education, family, health,
vocation, and culture. Some of the questions may evoke
painful memories. I understand that my child can refuse to
answer any questions and can withdraw from the study at any
time.

_____ YES

(Parent/Guardian's Signature)

_____ NO

Date _____

STUDENT CONSENT FORM

Student's Name _____

I give my permission to be a participant in the refugee student research project being conducted by Barbara Dillinger as part of her graduate program at Michigan State University.

I understand that the study will focus on culture, education, health, family, and vocational experiences and goals. The study will utilize two surveys (which the students will complete during class) and student autobiographies. Some of the questions may evoke painful memories. I understand that I can refuse to answer any questions and can withdraw from the study at any time.

____ YES

(Student's Signature)

____ NO

Date _____

____ I want to participate but do not want to sign my name. I would like to give my permission orally.

Appendix B
STUDENT SURVEY #1

WHEN YOU WERE IN VIETNAM . . .

Where did you live? (circle) IN THE COUNTRY IN THE CITY

How many people lived in your house? _____ PEOPLE

How many brothers were: OLDER THAN YOU _____
YOUNGER _____

How many sisters were: OLDER THAN YOU _____
YOUNGER _____

What was the last year of school completed by your:

FATHER 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 Other _____

MOTHER 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 Other _____

What was the occupation of your: FATHER _____
MOTHER _____

Was there enough food to feed the family? YES NO

Was there frequent illness in the family? YES NO

Describe any illnesses and/or injuries you had while growing
up in Vietnam? _____

Did you work to help support the family? YES NO

How old were you when you first began to work? _____

What kind of work did you do? _____



WHEN YOU WERE IN THE REFUGEE CAMP . . .

What was the name of the camp? _____

How many people lived in your house ? _____ people

Who did you live with? (circle) Biological family

Other family

Unaccompanied minors

Did you have a job in the camp?	YES	NO
1. How many hours per week did you work?		
2. What was your job?		
3. How many hours per week did you work?		
4. What was your job?		
5. How many hours per week did you work?		
6. What was your job?		
7. How many hours per week did you work?		
8. What was your job?		
9. How many hours per week did you work?		
10. What was your job?		
11. How many hours per week did you work?		
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77. How many hours per week did you work?		
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79. How many hours per week did you work?		
80. What was your job?		
81. How many hours per week did you work?		
82. What was your job?		
83. How many hours per week did you work?		
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85. How many hours per week did you work?		
86. What was your job?		
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92. What was your job?		
93. How many hours per week did you work?		
94. What was your job?		
95. How many hours per week did you work?		
96. What was your job?		
97. How many hours per week did you work?		
98. What was your job?		
99. How many hours per week did you work?		
100. What was your job?		

(If YES) What kind of work did you do? _____

Describe any illnesses or injuries you had in the camp. _____

CURRENTLY . . .

How many people live in your house? _____ PEOPLE

What language is spoken in your home? _____

How many brothers in your house are: OLDER THAN YOU _____

YOUNGER _____

How many sisters in your house are: OLDER THAN YOU _____

YOUNGER _____

What is the occupation of your: **FATHER** _____

MOTHER

Do you have a job? YES NO

(If YES) What kind of work do you do? _____

Circle ethnicity of biological mother. Vietnamese
Ethnic Chinese
Other _____

Circle ethnicity of biological father. Vietnamese
Ethnic Chinese
Black-American
Hispanic-American
Anglo-American
Other _____

If your biological parents are still in Vietnam, what are their occupations?

FATHER _____

MOTHER _____

Do they have enough food to feed the family? YES NO

Do you send them money to help them out? YES NO

Did you ever have to change your age? YES NO

(If YES) Why? _____

Are you older or younger than your stated age? _____

By how many years? _____

STUDENT SURVEY #2

What was the highest grade you completed in Vietnam (circle)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 12

How many years of schooling in:

Vietnam _____

Refugee Camp _____

U.S _____

Other _____

How long have you been in the U.S.? _____ months _____ years

When did you leave Vietnam? _____

How old were you when you left? _____

Who decided that you should leave? _____

Did you want to leave? YES NO

Who left with you? _____

Why did you leave Vietnam? _____

How did you leave Vietnam? (circle) Plane

Boat

Walked

How long did it take to get to your first destination?

Was anyone in your group hurt by pirates? YES NO

(If yes) How were they hurt? _____

How long were you in the refugee camp? ____ months ____ years

What was the name of the refugee camp? _____

What did you like best about the refugee camp? _____

What was the worst thing about the refugee camp? _____

Before you came, what did you expect life in the U.S. to be like? _____

How is it different than you expected? _____

What is the best thing about living in the U.S.? _____

What is the worst thing about living in the U.S.? _____

If you had the choice, would you go back to Vietnam or stay in U.S. _____

Why? _____

What are your plans for the future? _____

Do you plan to go to college?

YES

NO

What occupation do you hope to have in the future? _____

What do your parents/guardians (In U.S.) expect of you? _____

What does your family in Vietnam expect of you? _____

What do you worry about most? _____

What makes you happy? _____

What makes you sad? _____

When you're sad, what do you do? _____

What makes you angry? _____

When you're angry, what do you do? _____

Appendix C

LIFE HISTORY AND THE LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE APPROACH Instructions

General Instructions

- STEP 1: Discuss particular language functions (e.g., past tense, vocabulary, sentence and paragraph functions) to use in the assignment.
- STEP 2: Discuss the topic of the assignment with students.
- STEP 3: Students work on the assignment, starting with drawing. The task of drawing is expected to stimulate their memories about the topic which they will then proceed to write about.
- STEP 4: Student and teacher may read together what the student has written or teacher may edit for language functions.

Assignment 1

1. DRAWING: Draw a picture of you doing something at school.
2. WRITING: Tell me about your school, classmates and teachers:
 - a. In ESL/Bilingual classes.
 - b. In mainstream classes.
 - c. What do you wish your teachers understood about you?
 - d. Describe your first day at school in the U.S.
 - e. How is school in the U.S. different than what you

experienced in your homeland.

Assignment 2

1. DRAWING: Draw a picture of you and your family doing something.
2. WRITING: Tell me about your home and your family in the U.S. You may use the following as a guide:
 - a. How long have you been in the U.S.?
 - b. Tell me about your mother and father.
 - c. What do you wish they understood about you?
 - d. Tell me about your brothers and sisters who are living with you.
 - e. How are your home and family different from what you experienced before you came to the U.S.?

Assignment 3

(Teacher discusses timelines and draws a timeline of his/her own life. Students are then asked to draw a timeline of their lives).

DRAW: a timeline of your life. Include the following:

Births (self and siblings); Deaths; War; Moves;
Other significant events

Assignment 4

Choose one person or event from your time line. (For subsequent assignments have student choose another person or event that they haven't written about).

1. DRAWING: Draw a picture of that person or event.
2. WRITING: Write about that person or event.

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