

Exploration of the Value of Hmong-Related Curricula to Hmong American Postsecondary Students



Bao Kou Moua, Choua Xiong, One Yang, Dr. Christin DePouw ❖ Education Studies ❖ UW-Eau Claire

Research Question

- ❖ We employed Critical Race Theory (CRT) to explore the significance of and value of Hmong-related curricula to Hmong American postsecondary students.

Research Methods

- ❖ Participants are UWEC Hmong American undergraduates
 - 30 participated in semi-structured individual and/or focus group interviews
 - 20 participated in online Qualtrics survey
 - Data collection is still ongoing



Literature Review

What is Critical Race Theory?

- ❖ Theory that recognizes race and racism as deeply embedded in all aspects of institutional life, including education.
- ❖ Encourages contextual, interdisciplinary knowledge; experiential knowledge as counter to dominant narrative
- ❖ Challenges race neutrality, colorblindness (Yosso 2005)

Overview of Race and Hmong American Education

- ❖ Largest populations of Hmong Americans reside in California, Minnesota and Wisconsin respectively. Just under 49% of all Hmong Americans in the US (126,713) live in the Midwest. (HND 2013)
- ❖ WI Hmong American population is 49,240. Over 43% of Hmong Americans are under age 18; in comparison, only 24.2% of the US population is under age 18. (HND 2013)
- ❖ Hmong American students experience **significant disparities in access to college preparatory academic tracks**, often due to state-mandated systems of language classification lead to tracking.
- ❖ Hmong American students are also **overrepresented as English Learners** in CA, MN and WI (Xiong 2010).
 - For instance, even though many Hmong American students are 2nd or 3rd generation Americans, over 58% of CA K-12 Hmong American students were classified as English Language Learners in 2010-11. (HND 2013)
- ❖ Many Hmong American K-12 students **do not have access to culturally relevant pedagogy and curricula**, and do not have the opportunity to learn how to critically understand race and social justice (S.J. Lee 2005). This has significant implications for academic and personal identity as well as community cultural survival.

Significance of Ethnic Studies

- ❖ Ethnic studies is units of study, courses or programs that are centered on the knowledge and perspectives of an ethnic or racial group, their lived experiences and intellectual scholarship (Sleeter 2011).
- ❖ Developed to counter White dominance and Eurocentrism in curriculum, knowledge systems and the subsequent marginalization of People of Color.
- ❖ Research (Cammarota 2007; Cammarota & Romero 2006; Sleeter 2011) shows that well-designed and well-taught ethnic studies courses and programs lead to:
 - Positive academic and social outcomes for students related to academic engagement, academic achievement and personal empowerment. These outcomes occur for both Students of Color and White students. (Sleeter 2011)
 - Cammarota (2007) found that ethnic studies courses supported increases in academic persistence, achievement in participants. Also increased sense of self-efficacy and agency in relation to social justice.

Findings and Discussion

Racial Discrimination:

- ❖ Many Hmong American students reported growing up in majority-White communities where they attempted to “blend in” or downplay Hmong culture, identity as a strategy.
 - Respondents indicated that they hid aspects of Hmong identity in order to make White peers, teachers comfortable
 - Strategy resulted in Hmong American student discomfort in being “publicly Hmong” in many instances. Taught to privilege White comfort at own expense.



- ❖ Only 6% of survey respondents reported consistent access to Hmong-related curricula in K-12 education even though 79% wished to learn it.
 - Because of absence of critical race or culture-related education opportunities, many students unable to name their experiences as racial but are still made uncomfortable by them.
 - “I eat my noodles with chopsticks so I always hid my chopsticks when I go wash them because I didn’t want people to see. It was just kind of embarrassing. I never brought noodles to Davies.”
- ❖ When asked if they felt that “their non-Hmong peers have an appropriate level of understanding in relation to Hmong American history, culture and/or language”, 100% of Hmong American survey respondents said no.

Education:

- ❖ **Identity**
 - Lack of institutional and social support for Hmong identity development results in lower academic confidence, self-esteem
 - Lack of identity support makes it difficult to relate to other people, especially across race.
- ❖ **Access to Hmong-Related Curricula**
 - K-12: “Small segments of the Vietnam War or something.”
 - UWEC Hmong language class offered every other year:
 - “It’s very challenging because they only offer one class and it’s every other semester, so I could never take it.”
 - Have to research Hmong information on own because not available in courses: “All I really learn about is to how to be American.”

Family

- ❖ **Generational differences in language**
 - Difficult for Hmong youth, parents to communicate
 - “I can’t talk to her [mother] about my classes, but if there was a Hmong class I could.”
 - Hmong families emphasize community involvement, mutual assistance. Formal education that is Eurocentric may contradict these values, epistemologies and alienate youth from Hmong culture.

Conclusions & Recommendations

- ❖ Hmong Studies are academically and socially valuable to Hmong American students.
- ❖ In order for Hmong Studies to be effective, courses need to be well-designed, well-taught and offered consistently.
- ❖ Faculty with critical perspectives on race and Hmong Studies, who also understand Hmong epistemologies and ways of being, are ideal. Professional development for existing faculty and new faculty hires are necessary.
- ❖ Hmong Studies can help improve racial campus climate and equalize power relationships in decision-making and broader institution.
- ❖ Hmong American communities should be substantive stakeholders and decision-makers in Hmong Studies with power to veto initiatives, policies related to Hmong.

References

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