Lao participant, all the adults evidenced traditional Lao social norms for this ceremony by taking off their shoes and lowering their heads as they entered the room. When the teenage daughter of one of the participants entered the room to borrow her mother's car keys, she observed neither of these norms, despite the fact that it was a sacred ceremony presided over by Buddhist monks (field notes 4/1/95). None of the adults expressed surprise or shock at her behavior. This incident illustrates the very different social norms of parents and children in this community.

Many parents discussed the differences in discipline practices in the U.S. and in their home countries, attributing children's lack of respect in the U.S. to parents' inability to employ traditional methods of discipline. Parents were well aware of the legal implications of hitting their children in the U.S. and this issue was raised frequently by participants. When the group struggled to define the term "child abuse", one parent put it very succinctly, "Somebody call police, I hit my kids." (L., 2/17/95) In a later conversation about how children demonstrate respect, the following conversation ensued between two Cambodian mothers:

> A.: Children not listen, hit in Cambodia. Here not hit, parents scare go to jailed. children not scared of parents in America. In America, some people are good, some people not good.
>
> M.: In my country, all the children listen to their parents.

A.'s first comment makes clear her perception that roles of parent and child are reversed in the U.S. A. believes that children should be scared of parents because this will make them behave well. However, in the U.S. instead of children fearing their parents, the parents fear the repercussions of hitting their children. M.'s comment illustrates her agreement with A.'s previous statement; when children fear their parents' corporal punishment, it makes them listen to their parents.

Mrs. K. concurred that corporal punishment is more routine in Cambodia and that parents often have difficulty finding other ways to punish children because "they only know one way" (Personal communication, 4/21/95). Children are well aware of the rules against physical abuse in the U.S. and the general mores against physical punishment in mainstream U.S. society. Mrs. K. mentioned the problems this clash of cultures can cause in the school, describing the way children can utilize this knowledge:

> The kid they understand that parent cannot hit the kid. So they understand the rule. When some parent hit the kid, they come to school report to the teacher. The teacher have to sent the nurse. The nurse have to report to DHS. The parents, they don't know what to do. They only know one way. (Mrs. K. 4/20/95)

Mrs. K. did not clarify the extent of the physical punishment in these cases. Clearly, if situations of physical abuse are occurring, the school and social workers have the responsibility to investigate these cases. The point, here, however, is the cultural clash between methods of parenting and the problems it raises for parents. If Cambodian parents believe that physical punishment highlights their authority as parents and teaches their children to respect that authority, as M. and A. above clearly do, the American cultural framework in which children can report parents for this practice seems strange indeed to these parents. For them, it represents another example of the reversal of roles and the withering authority they can exercise over their children.

B.'s attempt to employ more 'American' style discipline provides an example of the ways in which changing parenting styles can be problematic. T., the ESL class teacher, mentioned that B. frequently asked her questions about how American parents disciplined their children. B. often remarked that when she scolded or punished her children, they thwart her authority, telling her, "This is America. This is freedom. I don't have to do that" (Personal communication, 4/19/95). In an attempt to provide B. with information about discipline practices American parents use, T. gave her a copy of *Angry Feelings* , a book designed to be easily read by ESL or literacy students. From the description on the back cover, this book "explores such issues as building children's self-esteem, coping with stress and anger, and improving family communication" (Feagin 1990).

B. writes in her dialogue journal about the book:

> Angry Feelings - That is my favourite book because I learning how to keep self-control and what I should do to my children in the future. In the past my children did something wrong or they break something I always scream at the children or yelled at them. I did not have self-control. Now I know I am not good enough mother. Because I never read any book fore concerning about raising children. (Dialogue journal from 12/4/94)

Although T.'s intention was not to denigrate B.'s parenting practices, B. seems to have learned from the book that she is not a "good enough mother." T. notes that B. has attempted to radically change her method of discipline after reading the book, remarking, "*Angry Feelings* has become her Bible. She relies on it heavily and uses the information (which is only one kind of situation) as a way, literally, a path to follow in raising kids"

(Personal Communication, 4/19/95). T. remarks that when B.'s 7th grade son skipped school two days in a row, she didn't reprimand him initially because she was too angry. The following morning, she calmly discussed the situation with him, without giving him any punishment.

Strategies Parents used for Education/Discipline

In the wake of the educational and behavioral problems parents faced with their children, parents evidenced empathy, as well as frustration, with their vicious cycle of problems some of the children experienced in school. One parent said, "I think, 'They go to school. They don't understand. They feel bad, don't want to go to school. They have embarrassed for somebody inside the class." (L., 2/17/95) Another parent spoke of her teenage son's habit of skipping school, "Sometime he go to school if he want to go. Sometime he skip school or go late 9:00. He go to school only 2 or 3 times. I think he drop out of school. I talk a lot. I say, 'It's your future.' Why does U. do that? I think he feel embarrassed. He doesn't understand at all" (B., 2/17/95). Parents expressed concern about how to help children with their difficult schoolwork, when their children's English literacy was often well beyond their own and when they often had great difficulty communicating with their children's teachers.

B., the parent in this group who was most proficient in English literacy, was able to read with and to her younger children. She wrote about reading with her 9 year old son a book about Southeast Asian refugees which she had gotten from her ESL class; she felt it was important for him to know about Laotian history and to improve his reading.

> The New Arrival. This book very interesting for me and my son P., because they talk about my country in the past that made remine me too remember about my life in the past. When we read this book together my son H. has a lot of question too me especially a Dark night (part 6). He asked me what happen in the dark night? I say everybody they are come from Laos to Thailand. they're across the Mekhong river at the darknight because they're don't want to kill with soldiers. They are many people diet (died) at Mekhong River because its fast and wide. (B.'s dialogue journal — 2/6/1995)

Most parents did not have the proficiency in English literacy to be able to do this, however. B. mentioned that with her older children, she had a different strategy to ensure homework was completed, "I ask my son. How many homework — 2 or 3? I check to see if he do homework. I count." (B. 2/17/95) Other parents reported pairing their older children or relatives to help younger children complete their homework assignments.

Another participant mentioned that her husband tries to help their children with homework:

> Sometime my husband take my kids go to library.... My husband he don't read, he don't write, but my daughter a lot homework. Sometime my husband look homework, he don't know. Too hard. (S., 2/17/95)

Later, S. mentioned that her husband talked to school officials to secure a tutor for their daughter, "Sometime my husband take my kid go to library. But right now my husband call to teacher, my husband go to school my kid. My husband go to office, say to boss, my husband say want tutor help my kid." (S., 2/17/95) Other parents reported that their children went to community after-school programs, but many complained that there were too few tutors to help the children and that the atmosphere was often too noisy for children to complete their assignments.

In addition to ensuring that homework was completed, parents used a number of strategies to encourage their children's achievement in school. Similar to the mother in Delgado-Gaitan's study who uses *consejos* to guide and instruct her children, many parents mentioned talking to their children about the importance of doing well in school. When I asked one parent to tell me what she told her children about school, she replied:

> I say, "All children go to school. You study hard. You study very good English. You study good job. You have to go to work. You have make money a lot. You go to buy your house and buy cars. You drive the car by yourself." I say that, "You don't go to the place around on the sidewalk." I say that, but I don't know she (long pause). I forgot English word, but I say Cambodian to my children.... I say that everyday. When my children come back home, I say when they eat lunch, finish they do that homework.... But I don't know how to speak and how to understand in English all. But my children learning a lot of word than me and I don't understand." (L., 4/24/95)

This parent clearly views success in school as key to economic self-sufficiency and stresses to children both the financial rewards of doing well in school, as well as the hazards they must avoid, "the place around on the sidewalk", in order to succeed.

A few parents discussed their developing English proficiency as important in assisting them to monitor their children's progress and behavior in school. Two mothers reported contacting their children's teachers for the first time. One mother said:

> I am afraid to son skip school. When I tell to my son K., today you have the homework, K. said I have the homework but I do that at school. I think K. lies me. But I call to K. teacher. (O., 2/10/95)

Often the threat of calling the teacher is a hollow one, for both children and parents know that making contact in English is very difficult. Being able to contact the teacher in this instance indicates an important source of control and power for this parent, as she is finally able to determine whether her son is telling the truth.

Despite parents' difficulty in contacting teachers or other school officials, the teacher told me of a remarkable series of events in which L. had advocated for her children on a number of occasions (personal communication 4/29/95). In the first instance, L's son was being beaten up on the way to the annex classrooms in which the ESL classes were housed. L., concerned about her son's welfare, got him transferred to the main school building for ESL class. Later in the year, concerned about her son's skipping school, L. called the teacher and talked with her in English about this concern, as well as her concern that her son was missing three periods of mainstream instruction while in ESL class. In another incident, L. had a problem with her 2nd grade daughter who does not attend the neighborhood school, and is bussed to another location. When L. was called to pick her daughter up from school, she could not because she doesn't have a car and wasn't sure where the school was located. Concerned about this situation, L. contacted school officials and had her daughter transferred to the neighborhood school. These examples indicate the perseverance of this parent and her knowledge of the school system, as well as the importance of bilingual counseling assistants who were able to help this parent negotiate the school system to advocate for her children.

Perhaps the most dramatic strategy used by parents to enable their children to succeed is the increasingly common habit of sending adolescents out of the city to live with relatives if the teens are displaying discipline problems. Mrs. K. reported: "Many parents send their kids out of the city to relatives out of the city. With the Cambodian parents, there's about ten parents this year" (4/21/95). Out of a population of "a little over 100 Cambodian students" (from counselor's estimate), this represents about 10 % of children who have been sent away to live with relatives. The counselors both mentioned recommending this to parents when they encountered discipline problems, and in fact when B.'s son began to skip school and she asked the counselor for advice, she recommended either moving or sending the son out of the city. Although B. thought this was an unfeasible and rather dramatic solution, she herself has considered sending her sons to live with her parents in Laos.

Ramifications of the ESL class on Parents' Empowerment

This class functioned in various ways to empower parents, providing them with information about American culture and schools, and various resources and strategies to use in helping their children. Parents discussed issues and problems regarding parenting and education during the class, sharing information about options and resources such as the location of the local library and the availability and effectiveness of tutoring/homework programs. The increasing literacy and English proficiency of parents also seemed to aid their involvement with their children's education in many ways. Some parents were able to help their children with homework or read with them and a number of parents noted that children helped them with their homework or reading tasks. These interactions around literacy provided a resource to both parties, as well as a point of contact for parents and children who seemed to be located in two divergent cultures. Parents' greater proficiency with English also helped them to interact with officials at their children's school, enabling them to communicate directly with school officials to obtain accurate information about their children's progress.

Parent's participation in the ESL class also provided them with an opportunity to ask questions of the teachers about American traditions and behaviors which they did not understand. B. wrote in her dialogue journal about concerns she had about her teenage son:

> Last weekend I saw alot the boys and girls came to he room and they do still went to party at the school. in my country the girls never come to boy or men's room.
>
> T., can you explain to me in American ways why the teacher make party for the students? Why the girls come to boy's house? How are they doing in American traditional? Please answer my question. Sincerely, B. (Dialogue Journal 3/28/94)

B. uses this entry in her dialogue journal to inquire about her sons' behavior and the role of the school. Although B. is clear that in her culture this behavior is inappropriate, she asks T. about "American ways" in an effort to judge whether this behavior is similarly inappropriate by American parenting standards. In this way the teacher can act as a cultural resource, allowing B. greater access to information about American culture. This information is particularly important, as children often used their greater knowledge of American culture in order to thwart parents' authority.

In an activity designed to have the SAAC parents ask questions of other U.S. parents, the teacher initiated a project in which the SAAC class collectively wrote a letter to a native English speaking adult literacy class. Students were asked to brainstorm questions they might like to ask the American students, and groups of students worked to write and revise portions of the letter. Many of the SAAC class' questions for American students revolved around children's behavior and education:

> We have many question to talk to American students.
> 1. How do people in the United States discipline their teenagers when they don't listen to their parents? How do you help your children with their homework when they don't understand? How do you help your children if they drop out of school? How do you take care of teenagers go to school if they don't want to studies and often go outside at night?" (Final draft of letter - 2/22/95)

This activity represents a way in which this class used students' developing literacy skills to interact with other parents and to gain greater access and information about American parenting and educational practices.

Conclusion

These data demonstrate that within U.S. culture the SAAC parents experienced difficulty asserting their authority and power over children in many ways. Children were often able to exploit their greater knowledge of U.S. culture in order to thwart their parents' authority. Many parents felt that their authority was severely damaged through not being able to physically punish their children. The different framework of respect in the parent-child relationship in the U.S. also was perceived by parents to accord them less authority. Parents experienced difficulty with the schools, both in communicating with school officials, which was hampered by both linguistic and cultural barriers, and in parents' inability to assist children in their education through practices like helping them with their homework and reading.

Despite these problems, parents evidenced a variety of ways to participate in their children's education: through finding other individuals or groups to help their children with schoolwork; advising and guiding children; advocating for their children with the school; and by sending adolescents to live with relatives if parents felt they could not mediate their discipline problems.

The parents' ESL class provided an avenue for parents to discuss and locate solutions for the difficulties of parenting in U.S. culture. The class

provided a forum for participants to share problems and resources; to increase English proficiency, enhancing the connection between them and their children and their ability to communicate directly with school officials; and to use teachers as a cultural resource in understanding and navigating children through this new culture.

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