

## Text and Worksheet: Primary Source: Interview with the Luu Family

In 1997, Joseph Hieu wrote his master's thesis entitled "A Study of Parental Interviews on Bilingual Programs for Vietnamese Students." In it, he interviewed several Vietnamese families. The following are excerpts from those interview transcripts.

Background information at the time of the interview :

- **Interviewee:** Mrs. Thanh Luu is the mother of seven children, five of whom were born in Vietnam. Her highest level of education is college, and she works as a teacher, making \$35,000 per year. In Vietnam, she was a teacher and she became a teacher after arriving in Chicago.
- **Time of immigration:** The Luu family immigrated during the first wave. The parents arrived in Michigan in 1978, one year before their five children arrived.
- **Family Background:** Dat Luu, like his wife, was also a teacher in Vietnam before the fall of Saigon in April 1975. The five older children, Nhan, Le, Nghia, Tri, and Tin, received engineering degrees from a university in Chicago. The two youngest children, Dzung (age 17) and Hanh (age 18) were both born in the United States and attend a high school bilingual program. They too want to enroll in university and become engineers. The Luus have always stressed learning and laid down strict rules for their children. Luu believes the parents' expectations and family support plays an essential role in the success or failure of children in school.
- **Place of Interview:** The place of interview is not listed.

| <b>OBSERVE</b><br>Identify and note details. What seems important to you? What seems interesting to you? | <b>READ THE TEXT</b><br><br><b>Interview with the Luu Family</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <b>QUESTION</b><br>What do you wonder about? What confuses you? What do you want to further investigate? |
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|                                                                                                          | <p>[deleted content]</p> <p><b>INTERVIEWER:</b> When did you leave your country?</p> <p><b>LUU:</b> When Saigon fell in 1975, my husband, our five children, and myself were hidden by friends. Seven months later, an attempt to escape the country was betrayed and our family was jailed. We were released 13 months later. We then planned the second escape. The children escaped by boat to Indonesia, where they ended up in the Galang refugee camp. Ten days later my husband and I left Vietnam on a small boat. It brought us to Malaysia, and we ended up in the Pulau Bidong refugee camp. Upon arrival in Malaysia we luckily learned that our five children were alive in Indonesia. We communicated with our children by mail and all decided to settle in the United States.</p> <p><b>INTERVIEWER:</b> What agency sponsored your family to the United States?</p> |                                                                                                          |

**Source:** Hieu, Joseph. "A Study of Parental Interviews on Bilingual Programs for Vietnamese Students." *Loyola University Chicago*, 1997, [https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc\\_theses/4286](https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses/4286). (pp. 132-137) This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License](#).

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**LUU:** My husband and I were sponsored by a Catholic church in Hudsonville, Michigan, in 1978. The five older children were reunited with us in July, 1979, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where they entered school. The following year, the family moved to Chicago to join other Vietnamese friends and to enroll our children in schools in the Chicago area.

**INTERVIEWER:** It seems to me that your journey to America tended to go smoothly.

**LUU:** No. I think otherwise. The fact that we had to divide our family into two groups would tell you how difficult it was to escape from Vietnam. Our family was among the luckiest. Thousands of Vietnamese escapees like us died at sea or were killed by pirates. Our escape wasn't easy. It took us 15 days to reach Malaysia. We had no water or food. Often we lost our hope, too. It took 30 days for my five children to reach Indonesia. High winds, rough seas, and a broken boat engine made my children's trip miserable.

**INTERVIEWER:** I have learned that you have children attending bilingual classes. Why did you decide on such a course?

**LUU:** My two youngest children, born in the United States, were very good in English, and they were able to handle assignments in regular, or "mainstream," classes easily. So they did not need a bilingual program on that basis.

**INTERVIEWER:** So what was the reason behind enrolling them?

**LUU:** To be honest with you, we wanted to teach all of our children at home because there are so many problems in American public schools nowadays. I did not want those problems to influence and ruin the lives of my children.

**INTERVIEWER:** You still have something more to explain?

**LUU:** Yes. As a mother, I wanted to enroll my children in programs that would benefit them. School should be a safe place for them to study. After visiting the school, I found that bilingual classes would be good for my children, not for learning English but for discipline, attendance, and cultural activities that could unite them with good friends. I did not want my children to make friends with the so-called "bad boys" or "bad girls." I wanted them to have good friends and concentrate on learning and living a life that makes sense. Besides, there is a channel of communication between school and home via Vietnamese teachers. They let us know about our children's progress in school. They also share with us any problems our children have in school. We parents also talk with one another very often about the education of our children. These factors make us, as parents, feel safe and informed. In short, I

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
|                | do not support bilingual programs because they teach my children English, but I still need them for the sake of my children's welfare in school. |  |
| <b>REFLECT</b> | What more did you learn from reading this person's firsthand account? Why is this source important?                                              |  |

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