

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: LOOKING FOR REFLECTIONS: THE LIVED
EXPERIENCES OF FILIPINO AMERICAN TEACHERS

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This hermeneutic phenomenological study explores the lived experience of Filipino American teachers in U.S. public schools. Grounded upon the tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology, the study is guided by philosophical works, including those of Heidegger, Gadamer, Merleau-Ponty, Arendt and Casey. Furthermore, I draw from Philippine and Filipino American scholarship, such as the writing of Enriquez, de Guia and David. In conducting this research, I follow van Manen's methodological structure of six activities: turning to the phenomenon; investigating experience as we live it; reflecting on essential themes; writing and rewriting hermeneutically; maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation; and balancing the research context by considering parts and whole.

The eight Filipino American teachers in this study have served as elementary, middle and high school teachers. Through one-on-one conversations, a collective group dialogue and in their reflective writing, their lived experiences of being racially and culturally misunderstood and the loss of native language emerged as essential themes. These revelations reflect the existentials of *lived body* and *lived relation* within the lifeworlds of Filipino American teachers. In addition, the role of place, namely that of the

distinct and limited presence of Filipino American teachers in U.S. classrooms and on school campuses, unveils the aspect of *lived space* upon their existence.

The insights from this study can serve to inform teacher education programs, school districts and the Filipino American community. Recommendations call for incorporating the unique lived experiences of Filipino American teachers within curriculum and conversations regarding diversity, inclusion and teacher identity within colleges of education. In addition, the study asks for school district leaders and school site administrators to engage mindfully with and harken to the culturally silent voices of Filipino American teachers. Yet the call to listen deeply to Filipino American teachers is also directed towards the Filipino American community, as choosing to be a Filipino American teacher is an existence that is not readily embraced within Filipino American families and the community. Therefore, the study recommends that the dialogue on what it means to be a Filipino American teacher continues, with the aim of further moving forward our understanding of their lifeworlds.

SEARCHING FOR REFLECTIONS:
THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FILIPINO AMERICAN TEACHERS

by

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DEDICATON

To my parents: Elvira and Rodolfo Castillo. Thank you for your love and support.

To my nieces and nephews: Angelica, Alejandro, Michaela, Ryan, Joshua and Rachel. Follow *your* dreams.

To Kasra. With you, this dissertation came to full fruition. A heartfelt thank you. Mahal Kita.

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CHAPTER ONE: BEING SEEN AS A FILIPINO AMERICAN TEACHER

Theresa¹, a Filipino American public school teacher for almost fifteen years, reflected during a conversation, “I’m really excited being a Filipino American educator! I wish I could have seen more when I was growing up.” In addition, “Now being a role model, hopefully I’ll inspire the younger generation either to go into math or into education.” Theresa’s reflection conjures up the notion of the significance for her of the lack of Filipino American teachers in her preK-12 classrooms and on school sites during her childhood. Moreover, as one of the limited numbers of Asian American teachers in U.S. classrooms today, she expresses her desire to change her seemingly anomalous professional existence by potentially encouraging Filipino American students to enter teaching as a career path, with her presence in the field serving as a symbol of what is possible. Theresa exhibits a desire to be seen as a Filipino American teacher.

What does it mean to *be seen* as a Filipino American teacher? Does *being seen* make a difference to Filipino American students or students of another racial, ethnic, or linguistic background? How are Filipino American teachers seen by Filipino American parents? In a 2016 U.S. Department of Education report, of the over 3.3 million K-12 public school teachers in the United States, only 2% were Asian. What is it like to be a teacher of color who is not seen?

Growing up Filipino American, my predominate exposure to being Asian American within American society and formal, public schooling in particular, has been that of the “Model Minority Myth.” Under this guise, *all* Asians are portrayed as high-

¹ Pseudonym. Each of the teachers referenced in this chapter was part of preliminary conversations I had prior to the start of this study.

performing academically, especially in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (e.g. STEM). Moreover, we often are viewed monolithically as hard working and exceptionally disciplined, supposedly leading us to be more economically well-off when aggregately compared to other racial groups. Thus, this feeds into the societal misperception that Asian Americans do not struggle with such issues as poverty or dropping out of high school. During my doctoral studies, I found in many respects that the “Model Minority Myth” overshadowed research with regards to limiting the racial, cultural, ethnic, and socio-economically diverse voices and experiences of Asian American students in public schooling.

What compels me to engage in a study that seeks to bring forth the lived experiences of Asian American teachers, specifically those of Filipino Americans? As posited by Reggie², a Filipino American teacher with whom I conversed, the Asian American diaspora is characterized by distinct patterns and backgrounds of immigration, history, culture, and language that are unique to each people. Such diversity is further reflected by the 2010 United States Census as it lists twenty-four Asian American groups in its reporting. Diversity and difference call, and I answer.

As I embark upon this research endeavor, I am truly full of wonder. O’Donohue (1999) writes, “Blessed be the longing that brought you here and that quickens your soul with wonder,” and “May you enjoy the critical and creative companionship of the question ‘Who am I?’ and may it brighten your longing” (O’Donohue, 1999, p. 50). Being a Filipino American educator for fifteen years, I often found myself asking that reflective question of “who I am” when in the midst of school communities whereby I

² Pseudonym

was a racial and ethnic “outsider” in my identity as a Filipino American teacher. Thus, I deeply ponder how fellow Filipino American teachers may encounter such notions as *identity* and *belonging*, particularly in light of our stark underrepresentation in the K-12 teaching profession. Do Filipino American teachers see *reflections* of themselves in the children and families they serve? Are there racial and/or cultural dimensions to their experiences? What does it mean to be a Filipino American teacher? Overall, the primary guiding phenomenological question for my study is: **What are the lived experiences of Filipino American teachers in preK-12 public schools in the United States?**

Being Seen

It is passing period, between class bells, and the hallways are strewn with high school students as Ms. Rodriguez³, a sociology teacher, carefully navigates her way to the faculty work room through a sea of young people. She is one of two Filipino American teachers, within a faculty of over 120 educators, and has taught at the campus for more than ten years. As she turns a corner, an anonymous student condescendingly, and in ignorance, yells out, “Konnichiwa!” The racial remark stings as she burns with anger. “I am not Japanese American!” she internally responds. Yet, the jarring moment of mistaken identity is not new, for based upon her physical appearance she’s often asked by students, “You teach Japanese, don’t you?” Ms. Rodriguez shakes her head as there are obvious visible distinctions between her and her colleague, Ms. Tanaka, including the fact that the latter does not wear glasses and has long hair.

One aspect of being a Filipino American teacher seems to include the notion of how one is *seen* by students, parents, and colleagues. The Old English etymology of *see*

³ Pseudonym

or *seon* includes to ‘behold’ and ‘perceive’ (Online Etymology Dictionary), reflecting a rather externally-based encounter, one perhaps between persons who lack relationships with others. As a result, perceptions may be held based upon physical attributes or cultural assumptions.

Being Seen by Fellow Teachers – The “Closest Match”

Reggie recalled that his first teaching position resulted from him being the “closest match” among the applicants to what the school’s administration believed was the “best fit” for the site’s newly-arrived Filipino immigrant students: a teacher of Filipino descent. Thus, Reggie was hired to teach English as a Second Language (ESL), history, and mathematics classes with Filipino ESL students, in spite of the fact he did not speak their native language, Tagalog. Moreover, he is not an immigrant. According to Reggie, “Basically what it came right down to was we had a large number of Filipino students at our school.” If we really “behold” the presence of Filipino American teachers, what might this do to how we see and perceive them?

Within America’s public primary and secondary school classrooms the current teaching population does not reflect the racial, ethnic, and/or linguistic backgrounds of the students being served. For example, in 2012, 82% of the K-12 teachers in the U.S. were White, while 49% of the children were students of color (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). At the federal government level, evidently it is a concern, for the United States Department of Education is currently pursuing an initiative whereby teachers of color, including African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos, are being encouraged on a national scale to pursue careers in K-12 public education. Such racial and ethnic diversity efforts will be supported through the recent establishment of a \$40

million dollar competitive grant program, the Hawkins Centers of Excellence, whose aim is “to increase the talent pool of effective minority educators by expanding and reforming teacher education programs at minority-serving institutions (MSIs)” (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). This initiative is based upon the belief that “[i]ncreasing the number of effective minority teachers for high-need schools is a key strategy for closing the achievement gap between minority students and their white peers” (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). When numbers of Filipino American teachers are higher, the focus on how they are seen changes.

What does it mean to hire a teacher who is perceived to be the “closest match” with students primarily based upon race or ethnicity? As for Reggie, did he as a Filipino American teacher, as per his school administration’s anticipatory perspective, make a difference or impact upon the learning and lives of his Filipino students? What did the students *see*? What was it like for him to be chosen as the “closest match?”

Being Seen by Filipino American Students – A Reflection

You look into me
 You see yourself instead of me
 I am true to the fact
 And can not lie
 I will be beautiful
 If you will be
 (Abdul Wahab, Poemhunter.com, n.d.)

Wahab’s poem, entitled, *Mirror (new)*, draws upon the notion of self-reflection; however, the image seen is not oneself in a mirror, but rather genuinely seeing oneself when looking upon the face of another. Levinas (1987) writes, “The manifestation of the face is the first discourse...The epiphany of the absolutely other is a face, in which the other calls on me” (pp. 96-97). Thus, it is the face of another that initially can draw us

into one another's presence, facilitating a connection, and in time, through interaction, enabling insight and meaning. Perhaps this is the sense of mirroring experienced between Reggie and his students. For he reflected, "It was interesting, cause...I know...I have pictures of them. I can still remember their faces...[Y]ou could see in their eyes that [they] were impressed to have a person that looks like them as a role model." Moreover, these moments may resemble a strong sense of *identity* between the Filipino immigrant students and their Filipino American teacher.

Heidegger (1957/1969) addresses the notion of *identity* within the context of "the *belonging* together of man and Being" (p. 30). He writes, "Man is essentially in this relationship of responding to Being, and he is only this" (p. 31), whereby *being* is "presence" (p. 31). In addition, "It is man, [sic] open toward Being, who alone lets Being arrive as presence. Such becoming present needs the openness of a clearing, and by this need remains appropriated to human being" (p. 31).

In Reggie's case, this sense of "openness" (Heidegger, 1957/1969, p. 31), and desire of his students to experience his "presence" (p. 31) as a Filipino American teacher, seemed to be represented by a "clearing" (p. 31). This clearing transcended the formal classroom setting as his students sought him out, even after they matriculated into non-ESL general education courses. Unexpectedly, however, the support they needed often did not originate from academic or school-based concerns. Reggie explained, "They would come in during lunchtime and after school to talk to me. What is most interesting [is] they mostly came for advice because they were having difficulty, not necessarily with their peers, but rather at home. Some of them had problems with their dad, their parent being too strict." In addition, "quite a few of them sought out advice [such as] what to do

when they finish high school, or [having] difficulty with their girlfriend or things like that.”

Reggie’s ongoing conversations with his students further reflect Heidegger’s view of the role of language with regards to *identity*. Heidegger (1957/1969) writes that language serves as the “vibration” (p. 38) that interlinks and articulates thinking, an interconnection and bonding necessary to “spring forth” (p. 39) a mutual appropriation between persons and their being. He posits that this appropriating event leads persons and being to enter into the “essence of identity” (p. 39). Furthermore, such an event creates an opening by which persons can “experience beings in a more originary way...the totality of...all their Being” (p. 40). Thus, the connections that Reggie and his students cultivated and nurtured with one another beyond their formal classroom interactions, seemed to open up for the latter a sense of wanting to express and further examine their total selves, which included family life and peer relationships.

According to Reggie:

At that point it became a real impact on me in terms of...it was important to kids of color to see people that looked like them teaching them also. And plus the fact that they saw me as a positive role model, as *I talked to a lot of them*. They did not see any educator or never had an educator who was Filipino...I think it allowed them to see how a person that looks like them was successful, and I think that was a real critical piece for some of them.

Moreover, Reggie described how the Filipino students, particularly the young men, desired more opportunities to interact with him on campus. Such pursued connections may represent a further sense of *seeing* between Reggie and his students, one that reflects an Old English etymological meaning of *see* that moves beyond a mere visual act to that of “understand[ing]” and “experienc[ing]” one another (Online Etymology Dictionary). According to Reggie, “They wanted to form clubs, but...I was

involved with other community items so I didn't have a club, a Filipino club, but I took on a future teacher program and a lot of them became involved because of that." It seemed that "the boys were really interested because they tended to gravitate toward me," recalled Reggie. However, "not necessarily because they felt out-of-sync with the rest of the school, but they felt it was important to have a face they could trust and they generally sought me out, talked with me." From Reggie's perspective, it seemed as though his students saw a reflection of themselves upon seeing him. It evidently began as an *identity* with an ethnically-familiar face. O'Donohue (1999) writes that "The human face is a miniature village of presence. Every dimension of the face expresses presence" (p. 59).

Reggie served as a highly-visible presence for students and staff as a Filipino American teacher on his campus, a corporeal sense of being that later developed into genuine rapport with Filipino American students through conversations and interactions in the classroom and the future teacher program he advised. Therefore, being a Filipino American teacher can initially mean being physically seen, racially and ethnically standing out among a K-12 teaching corps that is predominately White. Yet, as in the case of Reggie, this bodily view can evolve into a relational one, for as a Filipino American teacher he chose to connect with and support his students beyond the traditional classroom setting and within a Filipino cultural context. Moreover, Reggie's students wanted to continue to be in his *presence* and to be *understood* within a Filipino American student-teacher relationship.

Being Seen by Filipino American Parents – Being “the Custodian”

Later in his career, Reggie was selected by his public school district to serve as a vice principal at an urban middle school. He explained, “When I made [the] move to be an administrator, one of the schools I went to was predominately Filipino...almost 25-40% at one time.” Moreover, “the kids really appreciate[d] having...an administrator who was Asian, too...I saw that as something that was also critical at the leadership role.” Yet, Reggie was taken aback during certain encounters with Filipino parents at the site. “I’m working on campus and the parents walk up to me saying, ‘Oh excuse me, are you the custodian?’ ” He responded, “Excuse me, what is your assumption that you see a person of color [and conclude] that they’re a custodian?” Reggie continued:

I had to call them out on it, like you can’t have these low expectations. They were kind of shocked, but at the same time they were proud once they found out I was an administrator. That was kind of an interesting aspect of the *appearance*...expectations of a particular school. Not even expecting to see an Asian or Filipino administrator where they’re predominately Filipinos in that school.

How do Filipino American teachers *appear* to Filipino parents? The Old French etymology of appear is the stem *aparoir*, meaning to ‘come to light, come forth’ (Online Etymology Dictionary). Moreover, in the Latin adverbial form of *apparere*, a person who appears is said to ‘present oneself.’ When the presence of a Filipino American teacher “comes to light,” how is he perceived by parents of Filipino descent? Furthermore, reflecting upon Reggie’s experiences, how is he actually received? Do Filipino American teachers have to think about how they present themselves to students, parents, and colleagues because of their race and ethnicity? Can Filipino American teachers authentically present who they are? What can enable and support them to bring forth their true selves? Will they be accepted?

Building a Cultural Bridge

The Bridge Builder

An old man, going a lone highway,
 Came, at the evening, cold and gray,
 To a chasm, vast, and deep, and wide,
 Through which was flowing a sullen tide.
 The old man crossed in the twilight dim;
 The sullen stream had no fears for him;
 But he turned, when safe
 on the other side,
 And built a bridge to span the tide.

“Old man,” said a fellow pilgrim, near,
 “You are wasting strength with building here;
 Your journey will end with the ending day;
 You never again must pass this way;
 You have crossed the chasm, deep and wide -
 Why build you the bridge at the eventide?”

The builder lifted his old gray head:
 “Good friend, in the path I have come,” he said,
 “There followeth after me today
 A youth, whose feet must pass this way.
 This chasm, that has been naught to me,
 To that fair-haired youth may a pitfall be.
 He, too, must cross in the twilight dim;
 Good friend, I am building the bridge for him.”
 (Pitara, Poems for Kids, n.d.)

Moving beyond such parental interactions, Reggie’s racial, ethnic, and cultural experiences and understanding as a Filipino American enabled him to serve in a unique teaching and educational leadership role for both Filipino students and their parents: a cultural bridge. In creating such pathways, Reggie reflects the vision of the elderly man in Pitara’s poem, *The Bridge Builder*, possessing the wisdom to understand that future Filipino American children and their parents will continue to “pass this way” in the public school system. Therefore, fostering school-based support systems and systemic changes will not be a waste of “strength” and effort. Reggie recalled, “A lot of times I was able to work really well with parents because they already understand, there was also

that connection there though my [Filipino] language is not there.” Reggie explained, “They felt that they can relate to me or that I would understand some of [the] things they’ve been going through...the fact they’re recent immigrants, that their children are becoming more Americanized, losing the language or losing respect.” In what way do Filipino American teachers reflect back to parents what their child is becoming?

David, in *Brown Skin, White Minds* (2013), writes:

I thought anything made in the USA is better than anything made in the Philippines. I thought everything in the USA and about the USA was better than anything in the Philippines and about the Philippines. I thought being able to speak English well is a sign of intelligence and success. It seemed like the less Filipino you are, and the more American you are, the better [off] you will be...My attitude was “Hey, we are in America so act like Americans.” And in my mind at that time, Americans equaled White. (pp. XV-XVII)

Such a perspective of cultural loss can be attributed to a certain notion of assimilation, specifically a “straight-line” (Lee & Bean, 2004, p. 226) view, whereby immigrants within their new country lose their distinct ethnic ways (e.g. language, traditional cultural values) over time and become part of the majority culture. In the case of Reggie’s characterization and David’s description, they view themselves as being “Americanized.” There are many who believe that assimilation, a letting go of one’s native homeland traditions, is the best means by which immigrants can successfully integrate socially and economically into the mainstream of their new society.

On the other hand, Davidson and Cardemil (2009) define the concept of acculturation as “the process by which individuals and families adapt to the mainstream culture while maintaining connections with their native culture” (p. 103). Moreover, they write that acculturation “can be stressful for families, particularly when parents and their

children acculturate to the mainstream culture at different rates, with children typically acculturating more quickly than their parents” (p. 103).

Filipino American teachers represent a socio-cultural bridge between Filipino American students and parents as the latter’s children integrate (e.g. acculturate, assimilate) into American society within the context of formal schooling. Moreover, Filipino American teachers translate the changing behaviors of Filipino American students to their parents, helping families see that their children are learning to live biculturally within a western world in which traditional Filipino values may conflict with American ones.

While a primary and secondary education student, I obediently adhered to the traditional Filipino values in which I was reared. For example, I was taught by my parents that it is disrespectful to look an authority figure in the eye (e.g. teacher, older adult), and I should never “talk back” or verbally challenge or contradict an elder or person in power. More often than not, as a Filipino American child I was seen but not heard. However, when I began my undergraduate studies as a political science major, I found that certain Filipino ways of being disadvantaged me as a learner. My university professors and graduate teaching assistants expected me to engage eye-to-eye with them and my peers in critical, questioning dialogues and debates. Initially, doing so felt culturally and socially wrong. Over time, and in spite of struggling to overcome feelings of trepidation as an Asian American student in a White majority culture, I found my academic voice within a western learning and schooling context. At the same time, however, when I began to express my personal opinions within my childhood home, particularly points of view that were in conflict with my parents, I was characterized as

being *bastos*, or disrespectful, and a “rebel.” One rather heated conversation with my father led him to declare, “I did not send you to college to talk back to me!”

Experiencing my father viewing me in this way was quite painful. In moments when I sought to express my voice authentically, I was readily perceived as lacking respect for an elder, a shameful trait within the Filipino culture. As a result, over time, I learned to *be* bicultural – to navigate as a Filipino American child and young adult between two cultural worlds, each context comprised of certain and often conflicting values. My bicultural journey, in which I sought to move mindfully and fluidly between two distinct places – my childhood home and undergraduate university – was fraught with moments of self-doubt, uncertainty, and hurt.

Casey (2009) writes of the navigational prowess of the Puluwatans, a Micronesian people of the Caroline Islands. They are highly regarded for their ability to travel by canoe in the open ocean for hundreds of miles and at times thousands, without using such instruments as a compass. Moreover, it is rare for them not to reach their intended destinations successfully. Instead of employing mechanized tools of navigation, the Puluwatans “make use of a complicated system of signals from the seascape and skyscape surrounding them at all times” (pp. 26-27), which include the currents and swells of the ocean, and the changing color of the water, potentially indicating reefs below. In addition, a selected star bearing in the sky serves as a reference point over an island in the distance, creating for the Puluwatans an invisible line that is parallel with the horizon, enabling them to track how far they have traveled. A number of their methods (e.g. ocean currents and swells) allow them to navigate even during weather conditions that inhibit sight, whereby the Puluwatans draw upon their remaining corporeal senses.

For example, they may steer their canoe guided by the “feel of the waves” (p. 27) underneath. Had a Filipino American teacher been part of my schooling experiences growing-up, perhaps she could have served as a cultural navigator, helping me to understand and move through culturally-based family conflict, tension facilitated by the changes I experienced, particularly as I became more verbally expressive of my thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. Moreover, the presence of a Filipino American teacher may have also helped me to search for and find my “star bearing.” She could have provided a cultural reference point to guide and inspire me during those many moments in which I did not have a visually-clear sightline of the horizon.

To support Filipino American parents with the students’ cultural changes Reggie anticipated, he developed and taught workshops specifically for them. “One thing I had to teach them was your kids [will] become more Americanized.” For example, “What you’ll notice is that they’re going to be speaking up for themselves, which is important. But at the same time, it’s still important for the kids to be respectful and that’s where the tension occurs.” For example, parents may feel that “these kids are talking back to me, but are they really talking back or [are] they really trying to engage in a conversation?” In addition, the child may be expressing, “You know mom, this is what I’m really thinking, versus talking back.”

Furthermore, Reggie guided Filipino immigrant parents through a U.S. public education system that was foreign to them. The need for such parent-focused teaching is a reflection of a number of Filipinos in the United States of non-native status. According to the U.S. Department of Education, in 2007 of the over 2.3 million Filipinos in America, 70.4% were born outside of the country (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010).

Educational areas that Reggie addressed with Filipino American parents included their child's coursework. He explained, "I'd sit there and look at the classes that kids are taking and [I'd] tell the parent your child needs to be challenged. These are the kind of classes they need to be taking." His academic guidance included explaining what classes were necessary to meet college and university entrance requirements. In addition, when resources went beyond the ability of the school to provide, Reggie took additional steps to connect Filipino American families with organizations based in the local community. He recalled, "Some parents did not know how to access certain resources [and] I was involved with the Filipino community. I would refer them to the Union of Pan Asian Communities, Project Kalasugan, especially for nutrition and counseling." What kind of presence was Reggie providing through these connections? What was he bridging?

Reggie also challenged particular cultural taboos with Filipino American parents, such as the issue of mental health, when he observed students in need of such care. This issue is particularly sensitive within the local Filipino American community in which Reggie taught. A Centers for Disease Control report identified middle and high school Filipina American girls in his school district as having the highest suicide ideation rates among their peers of other races and ethnicities (Wolf, 1997). Reggie described, "One thing I noticed [is] that Filipinos or Asians tend not to want to go to counseling. There's a shame factor. So a lot of times I had to work with them and make them understand that this is what you need to do to help your family or children." According to Reggie, "Those are the kinds of perspectives I had with parents, which was a way to support them [and] to also teach them, too." What face does shame take with a turn for help?

Being a Filipino American teacher means fostering learning beyond one's students in the traditional classroom and the established school curriculum. Due to the low number of Filipino American teachers, their presence on school campuses engenders curiosity and surprise, drawing out Filipino American students to seek relationships and spaces in which they can share and explore their cultural, racial, and ethnic identity. A Filipino American teacher identifies the need to teach first-generation Filipino American parents, educating them on how to navigate a foreign U.S. public school system. What is this space of being-with, in-tension-with parents? A Filipino American teacher serves as a socio-cultural bridge between Filipino American parents and their children. The latter will undergo influence and change as they, too, navigate formal schooling within a western cultural context and traditional Filipino home – two value systems that can fundamentally conflict with one another. In addition, a Filipino American teacher serves as a link between the school and the community-at-large. They can help connect Filipino American families with Filipino and Asian American neighborhood organizations that can help support their physical and mental health, and overall well-being, with cultural competence and empathy.

The multiple roles of a Filipino American teacher beyond traditional classroom instruction reflect the notion of custodianship. When tracing back the origins of *custodian* to the early 14th Century, one can find an Old French connection to *gardien*, a guardian or keeper. Filipino American teachers like Reggie find themselves serving as custodial keepers of cultural understanding and affirmation for Filipino American students and parents within a western American schooling context. And yet, the custodian image Reggie rejected earlier, connoted something different.

Custodianship: Being a Filipino American Daughter-Teacher

I found myself in such a custodial role during my sixth year serving as a public school teacher as I taught at an elementary school where for the first time there was a rather large Filipino American student population. During the fall semester, one of the highlights for my sixth graders was attending camp, a week-long opportunity of hands-on science study in the local mountains. When reviewing the return of my class parent permission slips, I noticed one student's name was missing. Upon speaking with Maryann⁴ after school, she could not hide her disappointment as her eyes began to fill with tears. "I can't go, Ms. Castillo. My parents won't let me stay there overnight." I told her that I would be happy to speak with her mom and dad to see if I could address their concerns. Mr. Tolentino⁵ came to our classroom the next day. "Hello. Thank you for stopping by. Are there any questions or concerns that I could address for you regarding sixth grade camp? It will be a wonderful opportunity for Maryann to be there with our class to study science first-hand." He responded without hesitation, "No, Ms. Castillo. My wife and I do not want her to sleep away from home. You're Filipino...you understand." I nodded, "Yes, I do." In that moment, I felt as though I was eleven years old once again. Culturally, the notion of a Filipino child, especially a Filipino daughter, staying somewhere without her parents, was simply unacceptable. During my childhood, I was barred from sleep overs. When I saw Maryann the next day, she thanked me for speaking with her father. Yet, her sense of loss not being allowed to participate and share this camping experience with her friends, was apparent in her eyes. I gently gazed back.

⁴ Pseudonym

⁵ Pseudonym

“It’s ok,” I affirmed. “I understand. I’m a Filipino daughter, too.” She softly smiled and then held her head up high.

In that moment, me *being* a Filipino American teacher mattered. How could that experience been different for Maryann had I not been her teacher? Would a non-Filipino American teacher have acted differently? How would Maryann’s father been approached? Would the aims of an American school to provide enriched science learning and a camping experience for students have been promoted as more important than traditional, Filipino-based child rearing practices? Which perspectives are best for the child, and who decides? Do Filipino American teachers find themselves navigating between western and Filipino ways of being?

I unexpectedly found myself having to be the “guardian” of the cultural perspectives and values of my students’ parents when two of my sixth-grade colleagues questioned why Maryann was not attending camp. “You have to explain again to her parents why it’s important that she goes,” Marco⁶ argued, and Patricia⁷ nodded in agreement. “Her parents do not want her to sleep away from home,” I replied. “She’ll be fine there. There are camp counselors who will supervise the cabin. Talk with her father again,” he responded with a closing directive. “No, I won’t,” I firmly held. “She is from a Filipino family and I will respect their decision. Being reared in a traditional Filipino American family, I experienced my parents holding similar rules regarding sleep overs, particularly for me and my sister. I understand these parents’ point of view and I’m not going to pressure them to do something that is against what they believe is best for their

⁶ Pseudonym

⁷ Pseudonym

daughter.” My non-Filipino colleagues fell silent. What did this silence communicate? What did my voice do to engender this wall of silence?

Being a Filipino American teacher is an extended role, one in which you create spaces for student exploration of cultural identity and build bridges between parents, their children, and educational institutional systems and social support programs. Moreover, Filipino American teachers serve as guardians of traditional cultural values in moments when they may conflict with western norms. Thus, Reggie initially being seen by Filipino American parents as the school custodian, can alternatively be viewed beyond a stereotypical slight. Reggie, as a Filipino American teacher, served in a custodial role, thoughtfully tending to emerging cultural and social needs of Filipino American children and parents, areas which may be left unaddressed or potentially viewed as “foreign” in U.S. school settings.

When Being Seen as an Other: My “Not Being Seen”

Yet, what if *being seen* as a Filipino American teacher by one’s students means being looked upon as an *other*? Such a view reflects more of a Middle English etymology of *see*, a meaning in which one is ‘receive[d] as a visitor’ (Online Etymology Dictionary), suggesting the absence of a sense of *belonging*. When I began my classroom teaching career in urban schools, I served predominately students and families of Latino and African American backgrounds. At my first site, on the opening day of the school year, I remember twenty-five pairs of brown, fifth-grade eyes gazing upon me with a sense of awe. The children sat quietly at their desks, waiting for me to take attendance. “Good morning! I’m Ms. Castillo and I am so excited to welcome you to our classroom!” My

introduction was abruptly interrupted by one student. “You’re not Mexican!” Antonio⁸ accusingly called out.

At that moment, I felt like the idiomatic elephant in the room. Over ninety percent of my students were of Latino descent, and I came to understand that having an Asian American in their neighborhood, particularly as their teacher, was truly a unique sight for them to behold. In essence, I was seen as being different. The Latin origin of different is *differre*, or ‘to set apart’ (Online Etymology Dictionary). During those minutes of Antonio’s honest questioning, I felt a sense of separation from the classroom community.

I stood somewhat dazed. As a first-year teacher, I could draw nothing from my teacher preparation program. No formal university coursework prepped me for such an inquisition. My students intently waited for my response. “No...I’m not” I said. Antonio pushed further, “Then why do you have the name, Castillo?” In my mind, I believed that engaging in a diatribe regarding the over three hundred years of Spanish colonization in the Philippines simply was not age appropriate. I took a deep breath. “People from the country of Spain came to the Philippines...where my parents are from...married Filipinos, who then took Spanish last names.” Would that explanation be acceptable to my students? Would they be deeply disappointed to discover that I was not Mexican American? How could those potential feelings impact our classroom? Did I belong here?

O’Donohue (1999) writes, “To be human is to belong” (p. 2), and that “[b]elonging suggests warmth, understanding, and embrace” (p. xxii). Were my students going to reject me? Should a Filipino American teacher be here? I brought difference to

⁸ Pseudonym

their space, and in that difference, I reflected something back to them that was more familiar.

That moment brought me back to my interview with the school principal, Ms. Lopez⁹. As I sat at her desk, I walked her through my literacy portfolio, explaining how I would effectively scaffold the learning of both the native English and English Language Learners I would serve in my classroom. “This looks excellent, Eleonor,” she commented as she nodded her head in agreement with the instructional approaches I described. At the close of the interview she asked, “Do you have any questions before we finish?” I then expressed a rather deep wondering. “I know that the majority of students here are of Latino descent. Do you think I would be a ‘good fit’ for your faculty needs as I am Asian American?” Without hesitation she responded, “I think that it is important my students see role models of all backgrounds and to especially hear English-speaking role models.” The next day, I was offered a fifth grade classroom position.

Antonio’s look of suspicion left his eyes before he responded. “Oh, ok...that makes sense.” His classmates nodded in agreement. For the moment, I was acceptable. Yet, I knew that earning their respect, trust, and care would be a continual, year-long process. For one is not entitled to such rapport in my school community simply because of possessing a Spanish surname.

Being Seen As Being There

The notion of potentially being seen merely as a “visitor” at the urban elementary school was further reflected by a later challenge posed to me by my students. My class pushed behavioral boundaries not only with me, but with their math, science, and

⁹ Pseudonym

physical education teachers, as well on the playground during recess. For example, one morning, five of my students were sent to the office from the blacktop for participating in a game supposedly called, “Blood.” To “play,” students made a circle around one classmate. The children on the outside punched and kicked the one inside the circle. The “winner” was the one who sustained the blows for the longest period of time. What did this show about how they wanted to be seen? What were they concealing?

Near the end of a rather difficult school day, a number of my students said, “It doesn’t matter, Ms. Castillo. You’re not going to be here much longer anyway,” to which I inquired, “What are you taking about?” I was jolted by the response, “Last year, we had four fourth grade teachers.” That moment revealed that I was also being seen as a teacher within an urban school context, an environment that often faces higher rates of teacher attrition on an ongoing basis. It has become rather common knowledge that within the first five years of entering the profession, 50% of teachers permanently exit the classroom (Craig, 2014). Furthermore, “turnover is highest in low-income urban schools. The turnover rate for teachers in high poverty schools is almost a third higher than the rates for all teachers in all schools” (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 2003, p. 10).

In light of my students’ multiple experiences of being left behind by teachers, they did not expect me to be any different than those classroom figures who came and went only a year before. Thus, in their eyes, their sense of my difference could also be extended to whether I chose to stay grounded in our classroom space for the entire school year. Would I be a constant physical and relational presence as their teacher?

According to van Manen (1997), the “Lived other...is the lived relation we maintain with others in the interpersonal space that we share with them. As we meet the other, we approach the other in a corporeal way: through a handshake or by gaining an impression of the other in the way that he or she is physically present to us” (pp. 104-105). Yet, “As we meet the other we are able to develop a conversational relation which allows us to transcend our *selves*. In a larger existential sense human beings have searched in this experience of the other...for a sense of...meaningfulness” (p. 105).

Would I move beyond being an *other* teacher in the eyes of my students? In this classroom demographic space, how does a Filipino American teacher wholly embrace her sense of being in that the essence of her identity includes her cultural, racial and ethnic background? Furthermore, would I be *different* from the teachers my students previously encountered before? In particular, would I defy urban teacher statistics and choose to stay and engage in a year-long conversation with them? What would this conversation be?

Creating Identity Places and Spaces

Being a Filipino American teacher may also mean unexpectedly creating places and spaces that can enable students to grow in their sense of cultural identity. Such is a potential role that is often not addressed in traditional teacher preparation programs. Yet, choosing to open up such opportunities for self-exploration and examination beyond set curriculum standards may facilitate an extended learning for the “totality” (Heidegger, 1957/1969, p. 40) of a child’s being and their teacher, furthermore, creating a sense of *belonging* fostered through thoughtful conversation.

Gadamer (1960/2004) writes that it is through “genuine conversation,” (p. 385) a true dialectical engagement between people in which the dialogue naturally flows where it wills, that there can be an emergence of what authentically exists. Moreover, that this

linguistic process involves an opening up between one another, an acceptance of the validity of the other's perspective, and ultimately an understanding is reached. It is perhaps through such meaningful dialogue, and an aim to understand another fully, that belonging can be further nurtured.

A Place to Gather

Theresa created places and spaces whereby students could explore their sense of racial, ethnic, and cultural identity as Filipino Americans. Her first efforts took place at her initial site, an urban elementary school with a rather large Filipino student population, a demographic she attributes to United States military family housing nearby. Filipino Americans have a noticeable presence in the U.S. Navy due to enlistment opportunities afforded to Philippine nationals, as the Philippines was a former American colony and territory.

The after school Filipino club Theresa founded involved fifth and sixth grade students. She recalled, "We did [some] neat things there just to get the Filipino kids participating," such as "[we] talked about culture...[and] history." The club served as "a place to discuss...to gather and learn more about their identity." According to Theresa, "They really enjoyed it and they kept going with it," as the club was "an outlet to talk about things that were going on at home or things they were seeing." Theresa's motivation to create the club was rooted in her own identity as a Filipino American.

Seeing that there are a lot of Filipino kids at that school...I didn't want to wait...For me my experience wasn't till college when I realized all that stuff. So I was...try[ing] to bring it at a younger age...I felt like these kids...wanted that so *I had a place to speak about these things, talk about these things...*I did not want them to wait till college to help. This is my identity, I'm Filipino American.

Theresa, in seeing these Filipino American students, saw herself, reflecting the Middle French definition of identity or *identité* – that of ‘sameness, oneness’ (Online Etymology Dictionary). Moreover, De Guia (2005) writes that this sense of “shared identity” (p. 27) reflects what Virgilio Enriquez, a Filipino psychologist, called *kapwa* - the Filipino core value within Filipino “personhood” (p. 7). According to De Guia:

...the Philippine language provided a common place term that implied the extension of the Self to the Other. This word was *kapwa*...a Tagalog term widely used when addressing another with the intention of establishing a connection. It reflects a viewpoint that beholds the essential humanity recognizable in everyone, therefore linking (including) people rather than separating (excluding) them from each other. (pp. 7-8)

Furthermore, the notion of “personhood upholds the ancient viewpoint...where being human means being connected to other human beings and where each individual, although unique, is an integral part of humanity” (p. 8).

As a Filipino American teacher, Theresa created a space embracing *kapwa*, whereby Filipino American students could explore their sense of self while extending and sharing racial, ethnic, and cultural connections amongst one another. Theresa stated:

So let’s bring it up. I thought that fifth and sixth grade was a good time to...start bringing it up...I...felt like it kind of empowered the students to...get to know more about themselves. It made me feel better knowing that the kids wanted to know more, and hopefully that’s something that they’ll take with them as they move on and go onto middle school and high school.

Thus, being a Filipino American teacher also means seeing one’s *self* in *other* Filipino American sons and daughters, and feeling compelled to act upon it in ways beyond the traditional classroom setting. What does that *self* see that is reflected back as to how they are being seen?

Furthermore, within Theresa’s efforts we additionally find reflections of Heidegger’s notion of the “essence of identity” (Heidegger, 1957/1969, p. 39) as there

existed an apparent desire upon the part of Filipino American students to gather together. This provided a clearing for *belonging* and *being* in one another's presence in order to explore and experience a deeper sense of total self. In addition, by Theresa opening the *space* and creating a *place* for students to dialogue about Filipino American history and culture, the vibrational tool of *language* served as the means by which the mutual appropriation between an individual and one's being can take place.

Space to Grow

A few years later, Theresa went on to serve as a middle school math teacher. On this campus, that she attended herself as an adolescent, she characterized the student population as being 1/3 Filipino American. According to Theresa, "Having a lot of the students there, when they realize that I'm Filipino, they get really excited because they feel like wow, I can connect with this teacher!" Theresa created a Filipino club at this school as well. Yet, as her middle school students were older in age, she chose to extend their cultural identity exploration and learning by involving them in off-campus educational and cultural conferences hosted by a Filipino American collegiate student organization at a local university.

As the Filipino club advisor, Theresa created a space for students in which they could personally grow. She reflected upon a recent invitation to attend a high school graduation celebration for one of her former Filipino club participants who served as the organization's president. "I never had him as a student...[b]ut because of his experience in the Filipino club, it was his way of...recognizing that...I made a difference for him and for him it was allowing him to be a leader...because there was no other outlet for him to do that." Evidently, this particular leadership experience propelled him to continue on

as a student leader in high school. According to Theresa, “That made me happy, just because of that experience from that club he became this person he is now.” Being a Filipino American teacher means finding a sense of personal fulfillment through enabling Filipino American students to gather in cultural spaces. In that gathering, what is brought forth to be seen?

Places for New Play

In our play we reveal what kind of people we are.
(Ovid, 2014)

Children have always learned and created places for themselves through play.
(Barnes, 2014)

As a Filipino American teacher at an urban school site comprised predominately of a Latino student population, my racial and ethnic background seemed to bring about a sense of *otherness*. I have a Spanish surname, but I’m of Filipino heritage – a perceived mismatch that was challenged and questioned by students from the start. Thus, my initial experiences with the notion of the *essence* of my *identity* as a Filipino American teacher is quite different from Reggie and Theresa. At first glance, my students did not see reflections of themselves in me, nor did we appear to share cultural connections that would compel them to want to gather with me outside of our classroom. However, one unexpected means through which I created an opening to foster mutual appropriation was grounded upon play. Specifically, I did so by *being* with my students through playing basketball.

Within my first year of teaching, I quickly learned that the school playground is an extension of the formal classroom. In addition, as a woman of petite physical stature, I seemingly had a lot to prove during upper grade recess duty, especially to the boys.

However, initially unbeknownst to the children at Cortez Elementary¹⁰, I was an athlete who looked forward to my time on the blacktop. Recess gave me an opportunity to experience my students in ways that were often limited by the confines of the classroom and academic instruction. For example, my English language learners could express themselves through play, and children could share playful moments with family and friends from other classrooms. Moreover, I bore witness to the daily play on the basketball court, which was regularly dominated by boys who relished such a grand stage.

Gadamer (1960/2004) writes that “Human play requires a playing field” (p. 107), and on this field of play, boys sought to display their physical strength and deft athletic skills. Being respected and revered in this forum could have positive carry over into their neighborhood, an urban playground. Girls watched on the sidelines, spectators of the game. One morning, I walked up to a group of my female students and asked, “Why don’t you play?” “Girls don’t play basketball, Ms. Castillo,” Lorena¹¹ sarcastically responded. “Really? I do,” I replied with conviction. Their look of confusion and disbelief stayed with me.

At the end of that week, I wore jeans and a t-shirt for casual Friday and I laced-up my high tops. There was a buzz on the blacktop that morning recess as the news spread quickly across the playground that I was going to play basketball. I asked a male colleague to join me so that there would be one teacher on each team. A crowd enthusiastically gathered and play began. As a former high school varsity basketball player and competitive intramural player in college, I instantly felt the natural rhythm of

¹⁰ Pseudonym

¹¹ Pseudonym

my play. Gadamer describes this as “the ease of play,” whereby there is “an order in which the to-and-fro motion of play follows itself,” a movement in which a player feels a sense of “constant self-renewal” (p. 105). Students watched in amazement as I ran the full court with the boys, jumping and shooting the ball with agility and precision. And my abilities to “head fake” prior to jump shots and pass the ball without telegraphing my intent (not looking in the direction of the pass), added to my newly-found mystique as being more than simply a classroom teacher.

The fifteen minutes seemed to pass quickly, and as the recess bell rang, I found myself surrounded by my students. “You’re really good, Ms. Castillo!” beamed Eva¹². “I wish I could play, too,” Lorena followed. She was inspired. In that moment, I knew that I could not let this opportunity slip by. I asked, “If I create a basketball club for girls, will you participate?” To which they screamed a resounding yes! “Could I come too?” a student from another class shyly inquired. “That would be wonderful,” I smiled.

It was mutually empowering for me to be seen in this way. By watching their teacher, “a girl,” play a so-called game for only boys, my female students seemed to envision and expand the possibilities of what girls could do physically and mentally. Moreover, for me as their teacher it was moving to be excitedly experienced beyond the traditional classroom walls. Stepping out of the conventional teacher role and onto the recess space as a female basketball player enabled me to connect more fully with my students, and opened us up to further learning about and from one another, particularly with a mindfulness for our gender.

¹² Pseudonym

The Girls Basketball Club emerged as an after school program over a six-week period. I interwove within teaching and learning both the language of the sport and the physical movements they named, including jump shot, rebound, fast break, and free throw. Our gathering space was the blacktop basketball court, which over time served as a place for new play for the club members. This change reflected a new sense of identity around the court, for in essence the female basketball players chose to upstage a traditional gender notion that “girls don’t do sports.” The culmination of their transformation took the form of a recess game against a team of their male peers. Although the girls did not walk away with a win, their sense of pride, strength, and excitement towards this newly-found athleticism was indeed a victory. In addition, I and my students, both female and male, cultivated an “essence of identity” (Heidegger, 1957/1969, p. 39) through our play, creating a sense of *belonging* and deeper affinity that positively carried well into our formal classroom.

Furthermore, being a Filipina American teacher, a woman of Filipino ancestry, means embracing and expressing the complexity of who I am. For in these moments of play with my Latina students, I found a profound connection between our cultures as to how girls and women are supposed to act traditionally, an upbringing which seemingly reflects the shared colonial history of both Mexico and the Philippines under the rule of Spain and the Catholic church. In the case of the Philippines, it was the image of Maria Clara that was upheld as the ideal for over 320 years – a “lady” characterized by femininity, demureness, charm, grace, and beauty. Yet, in acts of corporeal transcendence, I experienced a sense of *Kapwa* with my basketball girls, a “shared

identity” (De Guia, 2005, p. 27) which rose above traditional cultural gender expectations. We chose to be free and play!

Limiting Spaces – When the “Only One”

At their respective schools, Reggie and Theresa were one of two Filipino American teachers. Evidently, this placed them in particular roles by administrators and colleagues simply due to their racial and ethnic background. For example, Reggie recalled an incident at his high school when Filipino students from another campus came looking for Filipino students at his site due to a conflict between the two groups. The leadership at Reggie’s school turned to him exclusively to address the potential crisis. “Here they go. What do we do [Reggie]? Can you help us with this?...And that was one of the frustrating things. Like hey, I’m not the only one. It’s not just my job. It’s everyone’s job.” Moreover, Reggie posited, “Then I really saw the importance of having people that are in tune to the culture of different students.”

With regards to Theresa, she shared that “The VP’s [vice principal’s] on [her] case...because he’s pushing [her] to do the [Filipino] club again” at her middle school. Moreover, “He hasn’t really asked any other teachers to do it. He’s always insisted that [she] or the other [Filipino] teacher do it.” Theresa founded the Filipino club and served as its advisor for a number of years until she created a campus math club, a student organization designed to compete in countywide mathematics competitions. She recalled that for one year she advised both groups, but “It’s just hard to balance a lot of that stuff. I wanted to do the Filipino club, but it’s just tough to continue to dedicate my time to it,” while preparing and taking her math club members to local competitions. Theresa seemed bothered by the fact that only she and her Filipino colleague were asked by the

administration to serve as the Filipino club advisor, for she knew of a Filipino club at another high school that was being advised by a non-Filipino American teacher. Thus, as a result of the particular leadership perspective at her site, the Filipino club no longer exists. What was the burden that became too much to bear? What does “the only one” end up being?

Seeking Out Other Filipino American Teachers

looking through a wall
past to what can not be seen
with eyes seeking all
(Elaina, 2013)

The poet Elaina’s haiku, entitled *seeking all*, seems to beckon us forward, urging that we move beyond what may be impairing our sightline at the moment. Moreover, she asks us to trust that once we scale over or navigate around the supposedly opaque barrier in front of us, our eyes can see more clearly and search for what we may long for or need. Being a Filipino American teacher can also mean *seeking* out other Filipino teachers for racially, ethnically, and culturally-specific professional support and educational resources. In the cases of Reggie and Theresa, their quest for collegial relationships and insight as Filipino American teachers meant looking beyond their immediate campuses.

Reggie expressed how it felt to have only one Filipino American colleague at his high school. “And a lot of times...what was sometimes frustrating was the fact I wanted to talk to another adult [Filipino colleague] about the [Filipino] kids...but she was more involved in a different curriculum area so that was even harder.” His need led him to a Filipino American teachers’ organization in his area. At the onset, the association served a social purpose, enabling him to meet other local teachers of Filipino descent. Over time, the goals within the group expanded to include developing curriculum and instructional

resources for teaching Filipino language and culture, and encouraging teachers to pursue positions of leadership within area public schools and districts. According to Reggie, “When I became involved in the local [Filipino] organization, I was able to interact with other Filipino educators and say hey, what do you do with this?” Moreover, he was introduced to additional cultural and educational resources, including conferences for both teachers and students. “In fact,” Reggie explained, “That was the bigger, the most powerful piece of being able to network with each other, share resources and share our expertise.” Furthermore, “take our kids to common places...where we could bring our own students to...different functions because we wanted them to experience the Filipino culture.” What did the adult presence bring out for seeing and being seen?

Reggie then went on to participate in a Filipino American teachers organization at the state level. He reflected, “I just wanted to *see* other people involved [in] different parts of the state. And it was really a good experience...because...I *saw* other Filipino American educators who were actually administrators, principals, at the district office.” Thus, “it became like...if they can do that, why can’t I?” The racial and ethnic reflections of himself that he found within the statewide group inspired and affirmed him, enabling him to envision the possibility of serving in a school site leadership role. Reggie recalled, “I remember my wife and I had a conversation...I’d like to start taking some leadership roles, become an administrator...I want the community to *see* that a person of color or Filipino could also be an administrator.”

Theresa became involved with an association for Filipino American teachers as well. She explained that “Being able to network with other Filipino educators was something that I was really excited about and just *seeing* what other people are doing and

being able to connect with other educators.” One particular experience with the organization enabled her to serve Filipino immigrant students better at her campus. She, along with additional Filipino American K-12 public school teachers and university educators, traveled to the Philippines. One of the aims of the program was to learn about the Philippine public education system, as many Filipino students enter U.S schools. According to Theresa, the benefits of this exchange allowed, “*Seeing* especially students that immigrate here from the Philippines, what is their educational experience like and be able to understand where they came from, and so I know how to be able to handle [a situation]...especially if the students are...from the province [rural] area.” She went on to describe how she directly applied the knowledge she gained from her travels abroad:

I had a student that just came in [from the Philippines], he just came in with slippers and he didn't know what to expect and he was just really shy...I just worked with him...helped him to get him out of his shyness and...showed him that I cared and that I understand where he's coming from. So he wasn't afraid to talk to me...I was at least able to gain his trust and so now when he *sees* me he smiles...and now he's at the high school. He's performing in...Phantom of the Opera and I'm just...amazed that this shy little kid from the province is now this blossomed kid...*seeing* that he's now pretty much all grown up and...more independent than he was when he first came here...I'm really happy to *see* that.

Being a Filipino American teacher means *seeing* the needs of immigrant Filipino students when they enter the United States public education system, understanding that the cultural and social transition can be awkward or intimidating. Moreover, Filipino American teachers understand that there are different racial experiences between Filipino immigrant children and their Filipino American peers. For example, recently-arrived Filipino immigrants are often derogatorily referred to as being “Fresh off the boat,” or FOBs, particularly by Filipino Americans. To illustrate, David (2013) writes:

I was confused about my cultural and ethnic identity for a while. Questions about why people made fun of me...Why do many Filipinos make fun of FOBs...Why

did I feel ashamed of being Filipino? Why did I try to get rid of my Filipino accent? How come my American-born cousins...were treated as being more special than me when they visited the Philippines?...Was it wrong to hold Filipino values and beliefs? (p. XVII)

Being aware of such struggles, Filipino American teachers like Theresa directly reach out to Filipino immigrant children, affirming their identity and presence, and serving as guides along their journey of acculturation into U.S. society. And in doing so, Filipino American teachers reflect the core value of *Kapwa*, a “shared identity” (De Guia, 2005, p. 27) in which they *see* a part of themselves in the immigrant child. Furthermore, they embrace their role as guardians of certain aspects of traditional Filipino culture within the context of schooling in America.

Seeing the Differences

In addition to seeking out other Filipino American teachers as a source of collegial support and resources regarding racial, ethnic, and educational needs, Filipino American teachers may also ask that the differences among Asian American groups and between immigrant and American-born Filipino students be recognized in order to meet their particular academic and social needs. For example, Reggie posited, “Another aspect I find with being...a Filipino American educator is that they say Filipinos or Asians, so you lump us all in one together. But it’s really important to really step back and look at...when they say Asians...there’s...Chinese, Japanese, Filipino and...Indochina. And within Indochinese there’s the Hmong, Vietnamese, Cambodian...there’s different groups that have specific needs.”

Reggie’s thoughts challenge the often misperceived notion of Asian Americans as being a monolithic community. In an *Asia Society* article, Kiang (2015) illustrates this rather common misperception, as experienced by a Cambodian store owner. He writes:

“He asked the price of beef. Then he said: ‘You Koreans charge too much.’ My brother said: ‘I’m not Korean, I’m Cambodian.’ But he’s mad. He says: ‘You Koreans rip us off.’ Reggie’s words also reflect a call for *seeing* each Asian ethnicity for its distinct cultural, language, and history in the United States. Moreover, by not disaggregating the experiences of Asian Americans, particular challenges can be masked under the Model Minority Myth. For example, of the over twenty Asian American ethnicities in the state of California, Hmong, Cambodian, and Laotian American “adults have the lowest educational attainment of Asian American groups statewide” (Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, 2013 p. 18), with 42%, 40%, and 39% respectively, not possessing a high school diploma – indicating that they “are less likely than the average California adult” (p. 18) to hold the degree.

With regards to immigrant and American-born Filipinos, Reggie expressed what he believed were certain differences between them:

There’s the immigrants...the first generation¹³, the second generation, like the second, the third generation have pretty much been successful because they’ve been around, but they have their specific needs. But then you have the immigrants who have their specific needs of language, fitting into the culture. Then the first generation that’s here...trying to determine who they are, trying to create their *identity* and how do we support them?

The 16th Century etymology of identity means ‘sameness, oneness’ (Online Etymology Dictionary). How does a Filipino immigrant child create her identity? Can Filipino American teachers nurture his identity creation? Is the goal to enable the student to feel the same as those around him, or is it to facilitate his sense of being whole, at one with himself? Does this reflect a process of acculturation, whereby she becomes bicultural: a

¹³ In this study, a first-generation Filipino American is defined as a person who was born in the Philippines and immigrated to the United States.

Filipina American? Are safe spaces for listening and dialogue needed? What oneness does the Filipino American teacher bring as a resource to the clubs?

Moreover, Filipino American scholar David (2013) writes:

When I moved to the United States when I was 14 years-old...I tried to fit-in with my American-born cousins, tried to dress like them, speak accent-free English like them, and enjoy the same things as them. However, no matter how much I tried...[p]eople made fun of me, teased me, called me a FOB (Fresh-off-the-Boat), laughed at my mistakes, the way I looked, and the way I acted. The message I received was that for me to be accepted, I needed to do a better job with being American and I needed to change a lot of things about myself; I needed to change my Filipino self. (pp. XV-XVI)

Such a view of change seems to reflect assimilation, whereby an immigrant lets go of his native, traditional ways (e.g. clothing, language) in hopes of being embraced into the mainstream culture of his new country. But when one changes externally, is he truly no longer Filipino within? Does he feel a sense of pain or loss in doing so? For Filipino American teachers, do they feel that they need to change who they authentically are in order to be accepted by students, parents, and colleagues? What is the “Filipino self” for Filipino American teachers?

Reggie shared how he struggles with what he described as the cultural and social transition of Filipino families into American society, a place change that can impact the relationship between parent and child. To illustrate, according to an eighteen-year-old Filipino American (David, 2013):

I don't know if my parents would have wanted me to learn about my ethnicity (when I was younger), especially since they were new immigrants and they wanted my sister and I to fit in. They didn't even give us my mom's maiden name as one of our middle names, which is customary with Filipinos. They were worried about teachers and peers mispronouncing our names. (p. 187)

The spelling of my name, Eleonor, has been a constant source of wonder, and in many cases, ridicule, throughout my life. It differs from the name's traditional spelling by one

letter: Eleanor – whereby the letter “a” conventionally follows the second “e.” I found the judgments I regularly experienced to be especially painful during my elementary school years when my teachers brought to my attention, with a tone of disdain and in front of my classmates, that the spelling of my name “was wrong.” The shame and humiliation I felt were so deep that in third grade I confronted my parents with tears streaming down my face. “Why did you spell my name wrong?” I demanded to know. Quite shocked by the outburst, my mom gently responded, “We named you after Eleanor Roosevelt, the wife of the U.S. President. We heard that she was a great leader.” In response, I quickly went to the bookshelf where my family’s set of red Encyclopedia Britannica books was neatly kept in alphabetical order. I grabbed the text with “R,” found “Roosevelt” and immediately showed my parents their life-branding error. “We’re sorry,” my mom responded with heartfelt sincerity. “We didn’t know.” As Filipino immigrants with a great respect for America, they wanted their daughter’s name to reflect that reverence and a life full of promise and hope for their child. Yet, in the process, unintentionally brought upon me were expressions of rejection, predominately from white teachers, leaving me with a feeling of otherness and a lessening of being American. During my childhood, instead of being angry with my teachers for their very public insensitivity to the notion of difference, I placed blame on my parents for the hurt I endured. In time, as my sense of self and identity became more grounded racially, ethnically, and culturally as a young adult, I fully embraced the distinctiveness of my name and the poignant immigrant story behind it.

What happens when an immigrant lets go of her ethnic identity in the name of being accepted by the dominant culture? Moreover, what impact does it have on

succeeding generations? In the face of rejection by the mainstream, how does one cope? What if Filipino American children want to know about their racial and ethnic selves? Do Filipino American teachers have a role in such self-exploration?

Reggie recognized his "...own frustrations working with our own [Filipino] parents and community...the concern that I have is...the importance to be American." From Reggie's perspective, he observes Filipino parents as embracing the English language over the preservation of native ones, and their "...definition of being successful" within an American context of "money" and "a big house." In addition, "[o]ne thing that [he] see[s]...missing is the relationship within the family structure." He believes that "[i]nitially it's there, but it starts moving to a fact that you know we're in America. We need to be successful," as supposed in western terms.

What does it mean to be "American?" Is it only measured in one's ability to acquire the so-called "American Dream" – including the amassing of material wealth and possessions? I have found that Filipino immigrants like my parents often use the phrase, "He's/she's American," solely in direct reference to an individual who is white. These experiences seem to mirror David's (2013) previously cited reflection that when growing-up, the notion of being "American" was the equivalent of being White. Such a point of view is ironic to me because of the fact that my parents are Americans through United States naturalization, thereby relinquishing their Philippine citizenship in the process. In addition, I am an American by birth, yet my parents and their immigrant peers will readily refer to second and further generation Filipino American children, such as me, as being Filipino, without regard to our status as Americans.

Furthermore, being White in the literal physical sense, particularly with regards to one's skin color, is highly-desired among many Filipinos. Prior to traveling to the Philippines in 2007, I was told by an elder, first-generation Filipina to be prepared to be looked down upon because of my darker skin tone. Knowing this, it was somewhat less of a shock to see the fully-packed shelves and aisles of skin-lightening products in Philippine convenience and department stores. Such thinking reflects the external images of "beauty" – fair skin, light-colored eyes and hair – that were socially-internalized in the Philippines for over three hundred years at the hands of colonial rule by Spain and the United States. David (2013), who lived in the Philippines until the age of fourteen, writes:

As far back as I can remember, relatives and friends talked about ways to make their skin color lighter, or at least, ways to prevent their skin from getting too dark. Many of them used bleach or skin-whitening soap on a daily basis. Others were so afraid of the sun that they would not come out of their homes until the sun is already beginning to set around dusk...The celebrities or "beautiful people" in the [Philippines] who were supposed to be role models and the ones many people tried to emulate were all light-skinned or were mestizos/as (mixed Filipino and White)...On the other hand, celebrities who often portrayed the villains in movies or the comedic relief characters that people make fun of, tease, or berate were often dark-skinned. (p. XIV)

What does being "American" mean to a Filipino American teacher? Does this view influence who they are in the classroom and when among their colleagues? Moreover, does this "American" sense of self impact how Filipino American teachers interact with Filipino American children and parents?

As a result of this purported aim by Filipino parents for themselves and their children to "be American," Reggie believes, "The kids lose track of their *identity*." For example, David (2013) writes about the experiences of a "young Filipina American" (p. 67):

Throughout my days at elementary school I had an acute fear that someone would discover that I was Filipino... There were... derisive nicknames crated by students... and a large number of stereotypes expounded and attributed to Filipinos. They were labeled as being stupid, backwards, and capable of only the most menial jobs available... In my own experiences, I knew that these generalizations were false, but sill I feared association with them. These images and stereotypes persisted in the consciousness of the student body for so long that I began to look at being Filipino as a curse. It embarrassed me that I should be a part of a race so disregarded and dehumanized by society. (p. 67)

Thus, Reggie feels that it is “important to have clubs” for Filipino students, through which they can “really explore and really understand some of the positive role models, the history of the Filipino American.” Furthermore, remarked Reggie, “That’s real critical and that’s one of the frustrations I have also being an educator.”

Being a Filipino American teacher means *seeing* cultural and social struggles of Filipino American students and their families, and in response, *seeing* the need to address them directly within the public school setting. How do Filipino American teachers enable these Asian racial differences and Filipino cultural concerns to be *seen*? Do only Filipino American teachers *see* these realities? What if there is a lone Filipino American teacher at the school site? Can he successfully address it by himself?

Seeing More preK-12 Filipino American Teachers

Reggie and Theresa reflected upon the lack of Filipino American teachers within their childhood and professional contexts. In addition, they expressed a desire to do what they could to change this demographic reality. According to Reggie, “I think the frustrating thing is that some of the parents or the children; do they value us as teachers and educators? They don’t seek that particular field... that’s one of the challenges I want to address... how do we get more of them [Filipino American students] into education?”

What does it mean to be valued as a Filipino American teacher? The Latin origin of value is *valere*, meaning to ‘be strong, be well; be of value, be [of] worth’ (Etymology Online Dictionary). Moreover, in reference to Old French, *value* includes the notions of “moral worth, standing, reputation” (Etymology Online Dictionary). In their potential roles as cultural bridge builders and guardians of certain traditional Filipino values, do Filipino American teachers represent a source of strength and facilitator of wellness for Filipino American students and parents within the schooling context? Yet, might Filipino American teachers, then, become overextended and find that care is focused away from them? Are Filipino American teachers seen as professionals with a reputation and standing that is worthy of admiration and respect by students and parents in the Filipino American community? What does this take?

A pair of lens you are
 So help the world see
 The long unthought of exit
 To the long sung bondage

A bandage you are
 For the much in fracture
 Deep stinging pain
 That only you could heal

A shield you are
 For so many targeted
 Small as you are
 The little you know
 Could save the world
 The pain long felt

A messenger you are
 For God to speak
 Of terror and blessing
 To befall and be rewarded
 So keep ear to the ground

Small or Big
 Despised or Feared
 Each one like you are
 Is a pillar so needed
 For so much to Grow
 So think and act Big
 (Aziz, 2014)

Aziz's (2014) poem, *Your Value*, reflects a number of roles that Filipino American teachers may play professionally in the lives of Filipino American students and parents. For example, they can serve as cultural lenses which *see* the struggles of Filipino American immigrant children and families as they acculturate into a western public school system. Gadamer (2004) writes about "Bildung" (p. 8), a concept he quotes philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder defining as the "rising up to humanity through culture" (p. 9). Aspects of Bildung reflect Gadamer's notion of "historicity" (p. 354), whereby in a quest to understand a person's lived experience, her past, inclusive of culture and tradition, impacts not only the context of present meaning but future horizons as well. According to Gadamer, in relation to Bildung, "Whoever has a historical sense knows what is possible for an age and what is not, and has a sense of the otherness of the past in relation to the present...what is in question is...what has come into being" (p. 15). Thus, the eyes of Filipino American teachers potentially can provide a human sightline, one that is more culturally-attuned to Filipino American students and parents, enabling the particular needs of the latter, to rise up and be brought forth.

Moreover, Filipino American teachers may provide both guardianship care and protection when a Filipino student or parent struggles with navigating academic and social aspects of schooling. Heidegger (1947/2008) writes in his *Letter on Humanism*, that for "man [sic] to find his way once again into the nearness of Being...[to] [dwell] in the truth of Being," (p. 223) he must care for fellow humankind.

Where else does 'care' tend but in the direction of bringing back man to his essence? What else does that in turn betoken but that man (*homo*) become human (*humanus*)? Thus *humanitas* really does remain the concern of such thinking. For this is humanism: mediating and caring, that man be human and not inhumane, 'inhuman,' that is, outside his essence. But in which does the humanity of man consist? It lies in his essence. (pp. 223-224)

In providing care for Filipino American children and families, and serving as a mediator between a western public school system and the values within a traditional Filipino household, do Filipino American teachers reveal the essence of who they are? Yet, at the same time, who cares for Filipino American teachers in the process? Who is concerned for their humanity?

Furthermore, Filipino American teachers serve as a voice within the classroom, on campus, and among non-Filipino educators on behalf of Filipino American children and their families in cases of cultural unawareness or misunderstanding. Lastly, in light of the limited number of Filipino American teachers in U.S. public schools, "Each one...[i]s a pillar so needed [f]or so much to [g]row" (Aziz, 2014). Thus, their bounded presence requires Filipino American teachers to, "...think and act Big" (Aziz, 2014), particularly to support Filipino American students and parents.

Beyond merely quantitatively increasing the number of Filipino American teachers in U.S. schools, Reggie also reflected upon the potentially qualitative reforms that may follow as well. For example, he shared a childhood story that left a lasting impression on him, well into his adult education years. He was four-years-old when he met his first American teacher. His sister was in kindergarten and her teacher came to their family home to meet his parents. The native Filipino language spoken in the house was Visayan.

My sister just started kindergarten and I was still four-years-old, riding my

tricycle in the back and this car pulls up and I see this lady. I thought this lady was just so tall and it turned out to be my sister's kindergarten teacher. And at that point, she met with my dad and the concern that she had was that my sister had a very heavy accent. We spoke Visayan at the house, so it was really difficult for the teacher to really understand my sister because of the heavy accent. One of the things she recommended to my parents was that, "You should really practice speaking English at home." So at that point, you know my father was really upset and his statement to her was: "You know what, you will teach our daughter how to speak English and that's your job. We will teach whatever we need at home." But even though that was stated, when it came down to it, as all of my brothers and sisters went through public education, we spoke less and less of our Visayan. So that became [my] first experience regarding education.

Reflecting back with a sense of loss, Reggie continued, "...one of the concerns I have regarding education [is] the fact...it should be additive language versus a subtractive."

What does it mean to lose one's native language? In a documentary for the Filipino Language Movement in California, an undergraduate studying Filipino language at her university expressed that "Language is culture. When you lose it, you lose a part of who you are" (Daquiog, 2006). Her perspective speaks to the notion of identity, and her sense of cultural loss in not knowing her family's native Filipino language(s).

A breath leaves the sentences and does not come back
yet the old still remember something that they could
say

the noun for standing in mist by a haunted tree
the verb for I

but they know now that such things are no longer
believed
and the young have fewer words

many of the things the words were about
no longer exist

the children will not repeat
the phrases their parents speak

somebody has persuaded them
 that it is better to say everything differently
 so that they can be admired somewhere
 farther and farther away

where nothing that is here is known
 we have little to say to each other

we are wrong and dark
 in the eyes of the new owners

the radio is incomprehensible
 the day is glass

when there is a voice at the door it is foreign
 everywhere instead of a name there is a lie

nobody has seen it happening
 nobody remembers

this is what the words were made
 to prophesy

here are the extinct feathers
 here is the rain we saw
 (Merwin, 1998)

In addition to English, my mother speaks three Filipino languages: Ilocano, Pangasinan, and Tagalog. My parents speak to one another in Tagalog, and I heard the language in my childhood home when among Filipino adults. However, my siblings and I were never taught our family's native languages. When I began to wrestle with my sense of racial and ethnic identity as an undergraduate, I confronted my mom in frustration, "Why didn't you teach me Tagalog?" My tone took her by surprise. "Your dad and I experienced a lot of discrimination because of our heavy accents when we first came to America," she sincerely expressed. "We didn't want you, your sister or brothers to go through the same thing."

Merwin's (1998) poem, *Losing a Language*, strongly resonates with the racism my parents experienced as Filipino immigrants, being seen as "wrong and dark" (Merwin, 1998), and the resulting impact on the loss of three native Filipino languages within one generation of my family's arrival in the U.S. For we "the children will not repeat the phrases their parents speak" (Merwin, 1998) as "somebody has persuaded them that it is better to say everything differently" (Merwin, 1998). In the case of Filipino immigrants, it is the notion that the "better" way of speaking "differently" is in the English language. This point of view was systematically and institutionally propagated via the establishment of public schools throughout the Philippines, beginning in 1901, under the colonial rule of the United States. The U.S. sent American teachers, called Thomasites, to the Philippines with the aim of "civilizing" and Christianizing Filipinos – mirroring Native American boarding schools in the United States. According to David (2013), "The Americanized educational system taught Filipinos the English language, inculcated Filipinos with American culture and values, and replaced the Filipino worldview with American political ideals" (p. 33).

The encounter of Reggie's family with his sister's kindergarten teacher reflects a continuation of the American colonial value of "English only," a belief that was enumerated by U.S. foreign policy, institutionalized through formal education, and carried out within the schools in the Philippines by America's Thomasite teachers. Yet beyond Reggie's childhood experience, he further reflected upon how this loss of native language affected him later in life as a Filipino American teacher. He expressed with a sense of frustration, "One of the questions that come[s] up to me is: 'So you're Filipino, but you don't speak the language?'" In addition to sometimes being questioned for his

cultural authenticity with regards to his Filipino heritage because of language, when it came to communicating with Filipino students, Reggie's monolingualism was at times a barrier as well. He shared:

They [students] came to identify themselves as Filipino and the fact that a lot of them spoke the languages, whether it was Visayan, Tagalog, Ilocano, which became really clear because they tried to speak to me. But at that point, I could not speak at all.

Are the lived experiences of Filipino American teachers impacted by knowing or not knowing native languages from the Philippines? Have the colonial American values of "English-only" impacted Filipino American teachers? If Filipino American teachers are solely fluent and literate in English, how is that perceived by students, parents, and colleagues who are of Filipino heritage, and of all racial and ethnic backgrounds?

One of the most painful memories for me in not knowing the Pangasinan language was being unable to communicate with a Filipina, first-generation elder in my family who was like a grandmother to me, especially as I never met my maternal or paternal grandparents. When Lola (meaning grandmother) Josepha turned 97-years-old, all I could verbally repeat to her was "happy birthday." In that moment, I deeply felt as though a significant part of my family's history and narratives were lost due to our inability to engage in conversation with one another across the generations. This sense of personal loss both grounded me and propelled me forward in my role as the statewide leader for the Filipino Language Movement in California (FiLM).

The day before I was to fly to Sacramento, as I was to be honored as Woman of the Year for the 78th California Assembly District at the state capital, I sat down with my sixth graders to share with them why I would be absent the following day. I explained that one of the reasons for the recognition was that I served as president of the Filipino

American Educators Association of San Diego County (FILAMEDA), in which I successfully led a grassroots community-based effort, the FiLM, to pass California Assembly Bill 420, legislation allowing students in our state's public middle and high schools to continue taking Filipino language and culture classes. Moreover, part of my leadership responsibilities for FiLM included speaking with state legislators on the importance of supporting the bill. During the conversation, one of my students, Marie, smiled and said, "My sister is taking Filipino language in her high school, and I want to take it when I go to middle school. Wow, now I know that I can thank you for the chance to learn Filipino!" Her words brought tears to my eyes. Furthermore, what was significant about the law was that it opened the pathway for the teaching of additional less commonly taught languages, such as Arabic, Farsi, Hmong, and Vietnamese.

Thus, *being seen* as a Filipino American teacher can also mean being placed at the forefront of the advocacy of one's cultural preservation, such as in the teaching of Filipino language. The Latin origin of advocate is *advocare*, meaning 'to call' (Online Etymology Dictionary). Moreover, in Middle English the etymology of advocate is a 'protector' and 'champion' (Online Etymology Dictionary) on behalf of others. As a Filipino American elementary school teacher, I found myself unexpectedly called to serve as the lead advocate on behalf of the Filipino American community in California – the Filipino American public spokesperson visibly championing the passage of AB 420 throughout the state. In doing so, I was asked to protect the future teaching of Filipino language and culture classes for students of all backgrounds in California's secondary public schools.

Do Filipino American teachers find themselves being advocates of their culture? In what ways may such a calling emerge and be manifest? How are cultural advocacy efforts perceived and received by students, parents, and colleagues of both Filipino American and non-Filipino backgrounds?

Bringing Forth: *Seeing Through a Phenomenological Lens*

Drawing upon Reggie and Theresa's experiences sheds initial light as to the potential impact that Filipino American teachers can have within preK-12 public schools in the United States. Moreover, their absence or limited presence can affect campus climates, particularly with regards to the learning, support, and socio-cultural experiences of Filipino American students and parents. In addition, their conversations bring to the forefront perspectives and expectations that may be placed upon Filipino American teachers by school site administrators and colleagues based upon the racial and ethnic background of the former. Yet, my experiences as a Filipino American urban school teacher reveal another set of experiences as to how student, family, and neighborhood demographics, and campus context, can yield a different sense of being a Filipino American teacher all together.

What do Filipino American teachers *see* when a Filipino student is in their classroom? If a Filipino American child crosses paths with a Filipino American teacher in the school hallway, what does she *see*? What does a Filipino parent *see* when he meets a Filipino American teacher? Do non-Filipino children and parents *see* Filipino American teachers differently? As a Filipino American teacher, what does it mean almost rarely to *see* colleagues of your racial, ethnic, and cultural background? What do one's non-

Filipino colleagues *see*? My phenomenological question, then, is: **What are the lived experiences of Filipino American teachers in preK-12 public schools in the U.S?**

To address this question, I turn to six hermeneutic phenomenological research activities, outlined by van Manen (1997), that form the basis of phenomenologic engagement:

- (1) turning to the lived experiences of being a Filipino American preK-12 public school teacher in the United States;
- (2) investigating the lifeworld of Filipino American teachers;
- (3) reflecting on the essential themes that emerge through conversations and written pieces;
- (4) describing their lived experiences through the art of writing and rewriting;
- (5) maintaining a pedagogical relation that is strong and oriented to the lived experiences of Filipino American teachers; and
- (6) balancing the research context by considering individual lived experiences and broader insights and implications. (pp. 30-31)

According to van Manen (2002), “Phenomenology not only finds its starting point in wonder, it must also induce wonder” (p. 5). It is this sense of wonderment that additionally calls me to undertake a hermeneutic phenomenological study, one that springs forth from the “lifeworld” (van Manen, 1997, p. 7), that which is experienced on an immediate basis and absent of reflection, abstraction, and theorizing. In addition, “Phenomenology attempts to explicate the meanings as we live them in our everyday existence, our lifeworld” (p. 11). Furthermore, hermeneutic phenomenology is human science research which can open one up to insights that could possibly and plausibly lead to a human science notion of progress. “It is the progress of humanizing human life and humanizing human institutions to help human beings to become increasingly thoughtful and thus better prepared to act tactfully in situations...to produce *action sensitive knowledge*” (van Manen, 1997, p. 21). Therefore, by bringing forth the lived experiences of Filipino American teachers in U.S. public schools, in addition to seeking to reveal their

lifeworld experiences, pedagogical insights may be rendered that could initiate progress (e.g. racial, socio-cultural) in such institutions as teacher preparation programs and preK-12 public schools in the United States.

As I move on to Chapter Two, I further draw upon my initial conversations with two Filipino American teachers and my own experiences as a Filipino American teacher. Exploring these perspectives continues to bring forth insights and dimensions of the phenomenon of being a Filipino American teacher prior to my dwelling among the participants for this study. Moreover, in the second chapter I look to etymologies, poetry, and literature regarding Asian American teachers as pathways toward seeking meaning and understanding of the lived experiences of Filipino American teachers. Then in Chapter Three, I provide the philosophical grounding for my phenomenological study. In doing so, I expand upon van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenological research activities and I address my inclusion of the works of Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer.

Chapter Four represents Filipino American teachers breaking their silence. Through conversations and by their reflective writing they unveil what it means to be a Filipino American teacher, including how they are readily misunderstood racially and culturally by non-Filipino colleagues and students. Then in Chapter Five, I bring forth pedagogical insights which emerge from the study. These revelations reflect a phenomenological voice, one that unconceals the existence of preK-12 Filipino American teachers in U.S. public schools.

CHAPTER TWO: THE ABSENCE OF FILIPINO AMERICAN TEACHERS

Encountering the Absence

As I move from being seen into the absence of not being seen, I explore the phenomenon in ways that are not immediately accessible. To begin, I return to my own teaching. I first professionally entered a preK-12 public school classroom as a Special Education instructional assistant. At that time, children of Filipino descent represented the largest racial and ethnic student population at Benjamin Elementary School¹⁴ in my hometown of San Diego, California. When I initially walked into any classroom, the Filipino American students quickly noticed me and always asked, “Are you Filipino?” When I responded yes, the Filipino American children smiled and verbally expressed their excitement: “She’s Filipino!” My *presence* as a Filipino American instructional assistant was immediately recognized and highly valued by students, faculty, and staff as there were only two Filipino American teachers on site out of about forty faculty members. Moreover, it was the school’s principal who recruited me after hearing me speak at a conference hosted by the Filipino American Educators Association of California, at which I shared my experiences in higher education as a Filipino American with the audience of K-12 public school principals, school district superintendents, and administrators. Benjamin Elementary’s principal believed that I would be a positive role model for the Filipino American students at her campus and that I would be able to provide racial, ethnic, and cultural perspectives and insights for the teachers in the school. She was seeking to have my experiences and challenges as a Filipino American within

¹⁴ Pseudonym

the context of formal schooling, help her faculty to understand The Model Minority Myth. This notion is reflected by the perception that *all* Asian American children are academically high-performing, particularly in the areas of science and mathematics, hard-working, well behaved, and economically well off. One Benjamin Elementary teacher expressed how much he enjoyed having Filipino American students in his class as he described them as being “good and quiet.”

The Latin origin of presence, or *praesentia*, is that of a ‘being present’ (Online Etymology Dictionary) – a being within one’s midst. For me to be a visible member of the Benjamin Elementary school community, a corporeal existence in this place, made the daily experiences of Filipino American students somehow different. Levin (2003) writes: “Thought is the bearing of the body, which is...bearing the life of our thinking. Thinking is thus embodied” (p. 90). Moreover, “ ‘To bear’ means to... ‘to bring forth,’ ‘to make appear’ ” (p. 91). Perhaps my new-found bodily appearance at the school brought forth thoughts among Filipino American students about what it could be like to see and experience a teacher of their own racial and ethnic background, a reflection of their excitement when I walked through their classroom door.

I quickly learned within this formal school setting that Filipino Americans serving in a teaching role were an anomaly. In 2000, of the over 24,000 K-12 public school teachers in San Diego County, only 355 were of Filipino descent, representing 1.4% of the teaching population (California Department of Education, 2001). Over a decade later, in 2011, Filipino teachers numbered only 487 (California Department of Education, 2012). Moreover, during my own thirteen years of primary and secondary education, I encountered a teacher of Asian descent only once. She was Filipina, born and educated in

the Philippines, who served as a substitute teacher in my sixth-grade classroom. The absence of reflections of myself within the faces of my elementary, middle, and high school teachers, communicated to me through a blaring silence that my role in a K-12 classroom is exclusively that of being a student. I was implicitly told that Filipino American children did not grow up to become teachers.

In *The View from Saturday*, E.L. Konigsburg (1996) writes: “How can you know what is missing if you’ve never met it? You must know of something’s existence before you can notice its absence” (p. 157). Filipino American teachers exist, but as their numbers are quite limited, their classroom absence is apparent. This absence is evidently noticeable to Filipino American students, particularly during those rather rare classroom moments when Filipino American teachers appear within the children’s midst.

Yet the absence of Filipino American teachers may also be felt by Filipino American teachers themselves. In Chapter One, Reggie reflected upon his first teaching experience, whereby he was one of two Filipino American teachers at a high school, and recent Filipino immigrants and Filipino Americans represented about five percent of the student population. During the on-campus incident shared, when a group of Filipino students from another school came to fight with Filipino students at Reggie’s site, the administration solely sought out Reggie’s help to intervene in the altercation. He believes that this was due to the meaningful rapport he developed with the Filipino students at his high school. Although Reggie understood why he was exclusively called upon for support, he also felt that his racial and ethnic background did not give his non-Filipino American colleagues a “free pass” with regards to not making connections with Filipino students.

Theresa had a similar experience, as also introduced in Chapter One. When she needed to step down from overseeing the Filipino student club that she founded at the middle school in order to pursue her master's degree, the principal would not allow the club to continue meeting without a Filipino American teacher serving in the advisory role. The only other Filipino American teacher at the site could not take on the additional time-responsibility due to having a newborn at home. As a result, in spite of high student interest, the organization was disbanded. Thus, with the limited presence of Filipino American teachers at preK-12 public schools, there can be an absence of openness by administrators or teachers of other racial and ethnic backgrounds to establish relationships with Filipino American students outside of traditional classroom settings, such as student organizations. Moreover, the experiences of Reggie and Theresa reflect how Filipino American teachers may be perceived as being "Filipino experts." As a result, Filipino American teachers may have additional professional expectations placed upon them to work with Filipino American students and parents that go beyond instructional responsibilities, based upon racial, ethnic, and cultural perceptions.

Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) writes:

Every external perception is immediately synonymous with a certain perception of my body, just as every perception of my body is made explicit in the language of external perception...the body is not a transparent object...it is an expressive unity that we can learn to know only by actively taking it up, this structure will be passed on to the sensible world. (p. 206)

Looking at the experience of Teresa, she and the other Filipino American teacher were perceived by their middle school administrator as being the *only* teachers who should serve as the advisor for the Filipino student club. The 1827 English etymology of perception is the 'intuitive or direct recognition of some innate quality' (Online

Etymology Dictionary). It seemed that in the eyes of Teresa's principal, she and her colleague possessed a particular inner attribute as Filipino American teachers that enabled them to be the "best and only" faculty members to work with Filipino students in this context – an external perception evidently drawn from the teachers' race and ethnicity, and which ultimately led to the disbanding of the Filipino student club.

Do Filipino American teachers encounter false perceptions? If Filipino American teachers are perceived or *misperceived* to "be" a certain way, based upon their bodily selves, how can they truly reveal who they are? By "actively taking up" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 206), or engaging with Filipino American teachers, I seek to create a space whereby they can authentically unconceal themselves. Moreover, through exploring their lived experiences, I aim to render the meaning of Being a Filipino American teacher.

What are preK-12 public schools missing in the absence of Filipino American teachers? Do our schools and communities experience a sense of loss in their absence? Are Filipino American teachers affected by the limited presence of teachers of their racial and ethnic background? In addition to the rendering of *absence*, what may dwelling within the lifeworld of Filipino American teachers reveal? Van Manen (1997) writes that it is through the gathering of the experiences of others that we can be better enabled "to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience, in the context of the whole human experience" (p. 62). Moreover, he states that one's self, the ego, is a "logical starting point for phenomenological research...as [m]y own life experiences are immediately accessible to me in a way that no one else's are" (p. 54). Therefore, I will further draw upon my own K-12 teaching experiences, along with my initial conversations with two other Filipino American teachers, as I delve

into a phenomenological exploration of Filipino American teachers in U.S. public schools in this chapter. In addition, I also turn to writing regarding Asian American K-12 teachers to illuminate my study further.

Filling the Absence

To this day, my mother still verbally expresses her disappointment that I did not choose to become a lawyer. In my particular case, it seems that the perceived lesser social status of the teaching profession, in contrast to a legal career, undergirds my mom's wishes. Rong and Preissle (1997) write that Asian Americans traditionally tend to cluster professionally in the fields of technology, medicine, engineering, and the natural sciences. They state that one reason for this occupational grouping is the influence of parents. According to Rong and Preissle, Asian American parents do not encourage their children to enter K-12 teaching, nor do their parents laud the profession. This could be the result of the lack of Asian educator models in U.S. schools, the negative interactions parents may have with institutional school structures that are expansive and bureaucratic, and/or parental concerns about what it means to be a teacher. Furthermore, Asian American children are not only highly influenced by the expectations of their parents when choosing a profession, but in choosing a college, major, and coursework.

Su (1996) writes that Asian American parental discouragement towards their children becoming educators is seen as being due to "cultural differences between Asian countries and the American society" (p. 127). The author states that "the problem" of the lack of Asian American teachers "is deeply rooted in the cultural values and social structure of the American society, which do not place teachers in their deserved high status with comparable respect and rewards" (p. 127). This is in contrast to the high

reverence granted to the role of teaching in certain Asian nations. For example, Gordon (2000) writes about the traditional Chinese view of giving utmost respect towards teachers, based solely upon their position. This notion differs from what is regularly experienced in American classrooms, whereby “respect is conferred on the basis of performance rather than position” (p. 187).

Do Filipino American families discourage their children from becoming teachers? What happens if Filipino American children choose to become teachers in spite of their parents’ wishes or pressure to do otherwise? The Old English origin of the word *choice* is *cyre*, meaning ‘free will’ (Online Etymology Dictionary). What is it that wills certain Filipino Americans to become teachers? Do these Filipino Americans feel a sense of freedom from pursuing traditional Asian professions in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM)?

When I served as a Special Education instructional assistant at Benjamin Elementary School, I initially viewed the position as a short-term employment opportunity to help pay for my graduate school expenses. Once I earned my master’s degree in public administration, I intended to be off to law school. Yet, a life-changing undertaking enabled me to begin the journey towards who I am truly meant to be professionally, what the Benjamin Elementary School principal saw in me before I did: a *Filipino American teacher*.

Choosing to Be a Filipino American Teacher

As I drove to work one morning, a jarring news report over the radio stated that according to a Centers for Disease Control (CDC) study, Filipino American high school girls in the San Diego Unified School District had the highest suicide ideation rate of

students in the district (Lau, 1995). My mind was reeling. When I arrived at the school office, one of the administrative assistants immediately informed me that the principal wanted to see me as soon as possible. As I sat down in Ms. Miako's¹⁵ office, I instinctively knew that she was aware of the CDC report as well. "We need to do something," she said to me in earnest. The suicide ideation revelation apparently troubled her greatly. I nodded, as it was evident that we were on the same page. "Whatever you need, Eleonor, you let me know." As I walked into the classrooms and throughout campus that day, I did so with a profoundly changed lens. Critically looking around me, I poignantly saw reflections of myself in the eyes of the Filipino American girls at Benjamin Elementary. Furthermore, I made a commitment to do what I could to empower them to not make the decision to become a suicide statistic.

Within a few weeks, I founded and coordinated the Benjamin Elementary School Filipina Mentor Program, an afterschool program that gathered together fifth and sixth grade girls of Filipino descent. Moreover, I recruited Filipino American and Asian American undergraduates from local colleges and universities to serve as mentors. In addition, I designed curriculum that included individual, small and whole group activities that enabled the students to explore Filipino American identity, culture, gender roles and dynamics within their families, among their peers, and in school.

The program served as a safe place whereby the girls could share their hopes, dreams, and struggles – genuinely be who they are. Casey (2009) writes that places have "cultural dimensions" (p. 30), extending beyond notions of body and landscape. These factors can be social, racial, ethnic, gendered, political, and historical in nature.

¹⁵ Pseudonym

Moreover, “Just as every place is encultured, so every culture is implaced. Taken as encultured places (along with the bodies and landscapes that bound, and sometimes bind, them) are matters of experience” (p. 31). The Filipina Mentor Program represented a unique and special *place* where the dimensions and experiences of Filipina American culture were explored and given a space to be voiced, thereby representing an affirmation of its implacement within the larger culture of the school.

At every program gathering, the school auditorium was abuzz with excited and thoughtful conversations among the girls and the mentors. On our first day, our dialogue was sparked by the question of “Who Am I?” The life areas explored included family, friends, and school. From this activity, heartfelt and powerful moments of sharing regarding Filipino American culture, identity, and gender emerged. Before leaving the campus that afternoon, I cried. During my childhood and into my adolescence, I never had such a space to explore who I was, or to seek affirmation and support when it was difficult to be a traditional Filipina American daughter within a western cultural and social context. For example, when growing up I was told to be well-behaved and quiet within the classroom, and to listen respectfully to the teacher. My voice was not viewed as being part of the learning. Yet, within the Filipina Mentor Program, the curriculum enabled the girls to experience the value and power of their individual voices, helping them to understand that genuinely expressing themselves did not mean disrespecting those in authority, such as their teacher. The following school year, I began a second mentoring program for Filipino American boys.

Through these groundbreaking initiatives, I was given the opportunity to be a *Filipino American teacher*, particularly during a time of crisis within the San Diego

Filipino American community as we publically confronted the reality of suicide ideation among our adolescent girls. Being a Filipino American teacher in that moment meant that my racial, ethnic, and cultural identity mattered, especially for the Filipino American students who were struggling with being in a traditional Filipino home while living in a western educational and social setting. My presence served as a source of support and affirmation for the children as to how difficult it can be to communicate with one's parents when the norms and values promoted at school were in conflict with those at home. Moreover, the Filipino American Mentor Programs represented safe spaces to speak and be heard, for both students and mentors, as these gathering places were grounded upon open and caring dialogue. Had I not been a staff member at Benjamin Elementary, would such programs have been created with cultural competence and understanding, and passionately carried out in my *absence*?

A Filipino American Teacher Identity

Choosing to *be* a Filipino American teacher means embracing my Filipino American heritage and allowing it to shine authentically where it may, and especially in those educational spaces where Filipino American children may need to see reflections of themselves. The late 14th Century origin of *reflexion*, or *reflection*, refers to “surfaces throwing back light or heat” (Online Etymology Dictionary). Being a Filipino American teacher means that I can corporeally and relationally illuminate moments when Filipino American students may need to connect with a person who genuinely understands what it means to live bi-culturally – Filipino and American. Moreover, I can thoughtfully shed light upon how the differences between the traditional cultural values within a Filipino American home and the western values expressed within formal American schooling and

society, can often come into conflict. In addition, as a Filipino American teacher, I can validate cultural and generational struggles while helping Filipino American students to embrace who they are wholly and learn how to communicate better with their parents and peers during times of contention.

Choosing to be a Filipino American teacher means understanding and embracing the unique role I can serve as an American of Filipino descent within the multicultural student context of U.S. schooling. It is a role that has called me also to be a teacher outside of the traditional classroom setting and formal curriculum. For example, I have been called to lead and facilitate cultural identity exploration and student dialogue through creating curriculum and spaces that enable thoughtful and meaningful conversation for Filipino American children. Furthermore, as a Filipino American teacher, I have fostered opportunities for Filipino American children to dialogue about who they genuinely are and who they truly aspire to be. In addition, I serve as a resource for administrators and fellow teachers when they have questions or concerns regarding the Filipino American culture, children, and families.

Filipino American teachers, however, can be contrasted with the identities of Philippine Overseas Trained Teachers (OTTs), which readily reflect a sense of *being foreign* within and from America. Based upon the Latin origin, to be *foreign*, or a *foreigner*, is *to be* on the ‘outside’ (Online Etymology Dictionary). Remy¹⁶, a migrant teacher from the Philippines expressed to me, “We (Filipinos and Americans)...have a problem. We both speak English. But there are phrases...to *us Filipinos* [that] mean nothing, but to *Americans*, mean something.” For example, at her first U.S. school, she

¹⁶ Pseudonym

taught a student who had difficulty reading what was on the board even when wearing eyeglasses. Therese explained that the student did not request to move closer to the board and remained at her desk, expressing that she could not see what was written. In response, Therese said to the child, “You already have four eyes and you still can’t see?” The remark resulted in a meeting with the student’s mother in the principal’s office. “The use of ‘four eyes’ got me into trouble. I did not know in America the use of ‘four eyes’...I’m sorry. I did not really know,” Therese explained to the parent. The saying of “four eyes” reflected a notion of the student having the visual support of glasses in order to see the writing on the board. “That was the first time I [taught] in the American setting.” According to Therese, her student’s mother “felt slighted” and perceived the principal as simply defending the teacher. “And to think, I’m a *foreigner*. I’m just new to the country,” recalled Therese.

Having an understanding of a particular distinction between the national, cultural, and educational identities of Filipino American teachers and Filipino overseas trained teachers, is critical to the context of this phenomenological exploration. The former *see* themselves as *being American*, while the latter can represent views and experiences of *being outside* of and *foreign* to American culture and identity. Moreover, media coverage, reports, and academic pieces on Filipino OTTs do not genuinely reflect the lifeworld of Filipino American teachers in which I seek to dwell for this current study. Thus, the absence of explicitly-identified *Filipino American teachers* within the work of scholars is critical to note.

Moving forward from this sense of difference, why do some Filipino Americans *choose* to become teachers? What happens once they make that choice? The 12th Century

Modern French etymology of *choice*, or *choisir*, includes to ‘see, discern, recognize’ (Online Etymology Dictionary). How does a Filipino American *see* himself as a K-12 public school teacher when such an image is almost non-existent? Is there an experience of discernment in becoming a Filipino American teacher? Will there be recognition of a Filipino American when she makes the rather unique choice to *be* a teacher?

My decision to be a Filipino American teacher was not made lightly, as I was reared to be an obedient Filipino American daughter, one who would bring a sense of pride, honor, and status to my immigrant parents and our family by choosing a highly-regarded, lucrative profession. And being a K-12 public school teacher was not viewed as such. Where do aspiring Filipino American teachers go for guidance if their families are against their professional pursuits to be a teacher? When I made the choice to *be* a Filipino American teacher, in spite of my family’s wishes, I sought out other Filipino American teachers for affirmation, support, and mentorship.

Searching for Support

searching for a hand
 searching for a face
 searching a voice
 searching a soul
 always so alone
 tired and tired
 I stop this search
 with emptiness I wander
 all along
 (Sharma, 2015)

My mom’s pathway to America as a Filipino immigrant was as a registered nurse, an occupation in high demand in the workforce. In addition, my dad’s journey from the Philippines began with his enlistment in the United States Navy. Growing up in San Diego, California, my Filipino American friends in the neighborhood and at school had

mothers who were care-giving nurses and fathers serving in the Navy, too. Moreover, at family and church gatherings, the Filipino American professionals I met predominately worked in these two fields. Not surprisingly, my parents strongly encouraged me to either pursue a degree in nursing or to serve in the U.S. armed forces. Thus, at Benjamin Elementary, when I *chose* to be a teacher, there was a noticeable *absence* of Filipino American role models in education.

Rong and Preissle (1997) write that there are factors within teaching as an institution that can influence Asian Americans to not choose K-12 public education as a professional endeavor. For example, the lack of Asian American role models in the classroom, and minimal to no access to information from parents and/or community members regarding teaching as a potential career, can affect the occupational decisions of Asian American youth. According to Su (1996), "...the lack of role models – minority faculty and staff in Kindergarten-12 schools and higher education including teacher education [serves]...as a significant deterrent" (p. 127) for students of color to pursue a career in teaching. Moreover, an Asian American teacher candidate in the study remarked, "They might not even consider teaching as an option because they don't see many (if any) members of their ethnicity in the schools" (p. 127).

Are aspiring Filipino American teachers searching for role models? Achinstein and Ogawa (2011) suggest that a role model is "a person who serves as an example of the values, attitudes, and behaviors associated with a role" (p. 15). A Mexican American science teacher named Jose states:

I'm a role model just by my mere existence...a Mexican American dressed in a lab coat is a thing that my students don't really see that often, and I think by being there I represent another option to my students...just being there and showing them, it changes the power dynamic if all the teachers are White and you're a

student of color. It implies that higher education is for White people...I'm showing them that, "Hey, it's possible." (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2011, p. 43)

What do Filipino American teachers believe their role to be? Moreover, does such a quest reflect the sense of lonely wandering that the poet Neha Sharma (2015) expresses in the stanzas of her piece, *searching*? Will the yearning to connect with a "hand...face...voice...[and] soul" of a fellow Filipino American teacher linger until another is found? Can a Filipino American teacher professionally thrive without one?

Park (2009) writes that involvement in an ethnically-based, professional support group seems to be quite beneficial for participants. For example, a Korean American teacher in her second year remarked, "I don't think that I could have survived the last two years [in teaching] if I didn't have [Korean] friends who are teachers. They can understand where I am coming from, the triumphs and disappointments. I've grown so much as a teacher by having [Korean] friends in the same profession" (pp. 130-131). In addition, another Korean American teacher described how the support of colleagues of Korean descent at her rather large school site of one hundred and thirty teachers, "helped her to establish herself at her school and to have a voice in decision-making" (p. 131).

Goodwin et al. (1997) state that an Asian American student in a teacher education program expressed "The need for emotional support...through the use of mentors, support groups for Asian American teachers, Asian American role models (e.g. faculty), and a buddy system with other minority students" (p. 224). In addition, a number of the Asian American teachers expressed a desire for professional networks for teachers of color, particularly for support in addressing racial bias in the workplace. For example, an Asian American teacher discussed the following remark made by a colleague: "...if a situation like World War II arose, the bomb should definitely be dropped again on

Hiroshima” (p. 227). Reflecting upon certain school site incidents as this one, Asian American teachers expressed feelings of isolation and lacking support. Furthermore, feeling a sense of disconnect on campus, one individual characterized a school environment of “invisibility” (p. 228) as an Asian American teacher. “I have not made many contacts [with people], but maybe I have just gotten used to being invisible...maybe subconsciously I am searching for people I connect with and because I don’t see them I just kind of give up” (p. 228).

Do Filipino American teachers feel invisible? The Latin etymology of *invisible*, or *invisibilis*, is to be ‘unseen’ (Online Etymology). Merleau-Ponty (1964/1968) writes: “To have a body is to be looked at...it is to be *visible*” (p. 189). Yet, he then further states that the notion of visibility “is not only that” (p. 189) observance of a physical presence, for being visible goes beyond flesh – it calls one to go underneath what our eyes can visually see.

Meaning is *invisible*, but the invisible is not the contrary of the visible: the visible itself has an invisible inner framework (*membrure*), and the in-visible is the secret counterpart of the visible, it appears only within it, it is...presented to as such within the world – one cannot see it there and every effort to *see it there* makes it disappear, but it is *in the line* of the visible, it is its virtual focus, it is inscribed within it. (p. 215)

Therefore, to make the invisible visible, Merleau-Ponty asks us to search for meaning of the Being inside. To limit one’s focus to the external is to remain myopic, and to maintain the invisibility of the Being that you think you see in front of you.

In Chapter One, Reggie and Theresa spoke extensively about the professional support they received through their participation in Filipino American educator support groups in their local community and at the statewide level. Reggie further expressed that the near absence of Filipino American teachers in American public school classrooms

matters, and changing that educational reality is a critical part of being in Filipino American educator associations. According to a U.S. Department of Education report (Snyder, 2010), during the 2007-2008 school year, of the over 3.4 million K-12 public school teachers, 83.1% were White. Blacks comprised 7.1 %, Hispanics 7.0%, and Asian Americans were subsumed within the category of “Other,” which represented 2.8% of the educators. Moreover, women represented 75.9% of U.S. primary and secondary education teachers. Therefore, being a Filipino American teacher can mean engaging in Filipino American teacher-based efforts to increase the recruitment of Filipino American educators into primary, secondary, and higher education institutions.

Theresa and Reggie also indicated that being in Filipino American educator support groups enabled them to support Filipino American students at their respective schools, as well as to aspire to such campus and school district leadership roles as principal and superintendent. Thereby, in a sense, the support of the Filipino American teachers’ organizations inspired them to engage more outside of the traditional classroom, and by doing so they became more *unveiled* in their *being* as Filipino American teachers. For example, Theresa founded the Filipino American student club on her middle school campus, and Reggie took Filipino students at his site to cultural conferences whereby they could explore such topics as Filipino American identity. Thus, does *being* among Filipino American teachers enable one to be more fully *seen* – racially, ethnically, culturally – and no longer be invisible?

Being the Other

I began my classroom teaching career at a Title I, urban elementary school where Latino children were the largest student racial population on campus. As a Filipino

American teacher at Gomez Elementary¹⁷, I was initially viewed with both curiosity and skepticism as to my belonging in the community. Being seen as an Asian American “other,” was a label that I worked hard to transcend, in part, by choosing to visit my students’ families in their homes. Doing so enabled me to learn more about their backgrounds, hear first-hand their hopes and dreams for their child, and to experience the neighborhood beyond the school gates.

Goodwin et al. (2006) discuss a sense of “otherness” (p. 231) experienced by a group of Asian American teachers reflecting on racially-discriminatory incidents. For example, one individual remarked that during her student teaching, “[she] would come home in tears. The kids would make comments... ‘She’s a chink’ and things like that” (p. 231). Moreover, feeling as the *other* manifested within itself a sense of disconnectedness from colleagues and the isolation that would frequently follow. Asian American stereotypes (e.g. limited English proficiency, exceptionalism in mathematics, soft spoken) potentially held by students, parents, and non-Asian educators, further fostered an *other* existence. One student teacher attributed such faulty images of Asian Americans to the limited opportunities for students to learn about Americans of Asian descent. She stated, “Their knowledge is limited to what’s on TV – for instance, China for them might mean kung fu or Connie Chung” (p. 232).

Nguyen (2012) writes about the school site experiences of preservice Vietnamese American teachers, four women who immigrated to the United States as post-Vietnam War refugees. One expressed “being the ‘other’ ” (p. 669). She explained, “In my view, the education field is usually dedicated to Caucasians...Being a Vietnamese teacher is ten

¹⁷ Pseudonym

times more difficult” (p. 668). Reasons cited for this struggle included language and physical appearance. A second student teacher stated, “They [White students and parents] may have a better living than I do and their English may be better than mine. It is not unusual for some to look down on me” (p. 669). In addition, a Cooperating Teacher (CT) who supervised one of the Vietnamese preservice teachers commented that the small physical size of the preservice teacher made it challenging for her to become a classroom authority figure. According to the CT, being of petite stature in comparison to one’s students impacted a teacher’s ability to “command respect” (p. 669). Thus, Nguyen (2012) states that not “looking and speaking like an American teacher...these VA [Vietnamese American] women stood little chance as race/racism is endemic and deeply engrained in US culture” (pp. 669-670).

The notion of “not looking” like an American is illuminated further by Ronald Takaki. The Japanese American scholar describes an encounter with a White cab driver as he was being taken to a multicultural education conference, where he was to serve as the event’s keynote speaker.

The rearview mirror reflected a white man in his forties. “How long have you been in this country?” he asked. “All my life,” I replied wincing. His question was one I had been asked too many times, even by northerners with Ph.D.’s. “I was born in the United States,” I added. He replied: “I was wondering because your English is excellent!” Then I explained: “My grandfather came here from Japan in the 1880s. My family has been here, in America, for over a hundred years.” He glanced at me in the mirror. To him, I did not look like an American. (p. 4)

Being seen as the *other*, in this context, neither being White nor a native English speaker, can lead to a sense of being unwelcomed as an Asian American teacher.

The other is a new taste, an echo
 from a distant shore, any place you have not been
 before, a country that insists on occupying the map,
 an unforeseen epic
 journey.

The other is a smell you disapprove of,
 as strong, sensual, homely
 as your own; a dark secret you enter
 as you would an abandoned path in search of
 misplaced dreams.

The other is an unclimbed mountain
 veiled in mist; a poem that baffles;
 yourself in a story minus your heroics; a haunting
 melody, someone else's pain whose trail leads
 to your door.
 (Peeradina, 1995, pp. 60-61)

The Vietnamese American preservice teachers shared school site experiences whereby they encountered disapproval and rejection based upon their race and culture. As reflected in Peeradina's poem, it was as though they were an unpleasant "smell" (p. 61) from a foreign country that did not belong in an American classroom in the role of a teacher. In addition, these perceptions of the Vietnamese American student teachers created a racialized distance between faculty, students, and parents, further veiling this particular group of Asian Americans within an opaque "mist" (p. 61) of *otherness*.

Do Filipino American teachers feel welcomed on their campuses? Are they seen as not being American? How are Filipino American teachers approached by non-Filipino students, parents, or colleagues? Are Filipino American teachers viewed with curious wonderment, or are they perhaps characterized as being of a foreign scent? Do Filipino American teachers exist in their classrooms and school sites, mystically shrouded and seen as an *other*? Does their presence draw out feelings of bewilderment? For me, choosing to conduct home visits within my predominately Latino school community, was

one of a number of initiatives I undertook towards dispelling the sense of *otherness* I initially encountered within the classroom and on campus as a Filipino American teacher at Gomez Elementary. How have fellow Filipino American teachers responded if perceived as the *other*?

Feeling as *others*, the Vietnamese American preservice teachers also described having a sense of no voice, presence, or power at their school sites. Nguyen (2012) writes, they “often expressed that they ‘had not found a voice to present their ideas or themselves to a strange audience’ ” (p. 674). One student teacher said:

What good does it do for me to fight back? I’m just a student teacher. I’m Vietnamese, not American like them. When I attend faculty meetings with my cooperating teacher, I notice that even the Vietnamese teachers, with credentials and teaching for a long time, still sit in the back of the room and never ask questions or disagree with others. They are always silent. Why would they listen to me? (p. 675)

Asian American teachers in Goodwin et al. (2006) described “being voiceless” (p. 228) as well. From the point of view of one Asian American teacher, “It [the Asian American voice] doesn’t make a difference.” Another said that her fellow Asian American educators “...tend to be quiet in their voices, like they’re observing and don’t want to bump the scale” (p. 228). This rather traditional Asian cultural notion is reflected in a Japanese idiom told to me in an Asian American studies class as an undergraduate: “The nail that stands up gets hammered down.” As an Asian American, when growing up it was regularly modelled to me by first-generation elders to not “make waves” – not to be the source of conflict, challenge, or uncomfortableness among those around me, especially with individuals seen as being in positions of authority. However, finding my voice as a Filipino American teacher meant unbinding myself from these particular traditional Filipino values instilled in me by my parents. Speaking up to advocate for the

needs of my students, parents, and colleagues, is one aspect of my identity as an American teacher of Filipino descent that I have taken up due to my own experience of being silenced. Do Filipino American teachers have a voice on their school sites? Are they heard?

Being the Oriental

During my conversation with Reggie, he expressed his concern that Filipino Americans were often amalgamated within the over-arching racial category of Asian, whereby the unique history and culture of Filipino Americans would be concealed. Moreover, he felt that such a societal view was problematic as it would not allow for the specific needs of their respective communities to be addressed. Goodwin et al. (2006) discuss experiences in which Asian American teachers were viewed as being one, homogenous group – negating the distinctive multiethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity of the Asian American diaspora. The authors referred to this perspective by non-Asians as “the Universal Oriental” (p. 232). It is a perception that could be described as opaque, one that does not allow a certain Asian ethnicity to be truly seen. For example, one Asian American teacher in the study said that there were “students who don’t know the difference between Japanese American, Chinese American, Korean American” (p. 232). In addition, another person shared how being one of a handful of Asian American teachers at her school site resulted in non-Asian colleagues coming to her for her supposed expertise on the entirety of Asian issues, being deemed “the Asian expert” (p. 232).

Do Filipino American teachers encounter “oriental” perspectives when among students, parents, and colleagues? What does it mean to not be seen for who you truly

are? Are Filipino American teachers considered to be the “Asian experts” amongst their non-Asian American colleagues? To transcend the notion of the “universal oriental,” are Filipino American teachers comfortable in unveiling their authentic racial, ethnic, and cultural identities?

Living in California, home to the largest Asian American population in the nation, and specifically, growing up in San Diego, whereby Filipino Americans comprise the largest Asian American ethnicity in the county, it was rather common for people to recognize my specific racial and ethnic background. However, upon moving to and living in the Washington, D.C. region for six years, I learned not to take such interactions for granted. *Being* in this demographically-different space, I experienced “universal orientalism” first-hand. For example, one unexpected incident occurred while onboard the Metro. I and a female graduate student of Korean descent were returning to College Park after watching a Washington Nationals baseball game. Upon entering the train car, a group of black men yelled out at us, “Konichiwa!” They continued their racial jeers and rambunctious laughter as we sat down. I wanted to scream back, “We’re not Japanese, you idiots!” However, I sat stoically silent, cognizant of the fact that as there were only two of us, we were potentially vulnerable should the situation escalate. The anger and pain I felt during that verbal assault, reflected being racially objectified and marginalized. My friend and I were neither seen nor respected for the two distinctive Asian cultures and ethnicities that we represent.

As a graduate instructor for my department, I had the privilege to serve as the instructor of record for an undergraduate education policy studies course. In this role, I was given certain faculty responsibilities, including creating, developing, and

administering the class curriculum and assessments, and determining student grades. In light of the demographics of both my students and our department instructors, who were predominately White, and economically middle and upper class, I was well aware that I would be a racial, ethnic, and cultural anomaly as a university classroom teacher. Moreover, as a product of and former K-12 teacher in Title I, urban public schools, I could also provide first-hand, socio-economic experiences and perspectives within the education system. I did not choose to hide my sense of identity as a Filipino American woman and urban teacher when I taught the Education Foundations course. Throughout the semester my students and I would wrestle with the historical, social-cultural, and ideological foundations of public education in the United States since our nation's founding. Furthermore, I asked my students to share who they were as well, as our race, ethnicity, gender, religion, native language and socio-economic status are among multiple factors that impact our opportunities and experiences within formal schooling. By being fully open to expressing my *Being* as a Filipino American teacher, I sought to move beyond the potential limiting and stereotypical perception of the "universal oriental."

Being Absent Within the Curriculum

One of the most exciting curricular aspects of being an urban teacher of color within a Title I setting, was being given the opportunity and responsibility of facilitating the building and development of a classroom library. When undertaking this task, I assessed and surveyed my students to learn their reading levels and interests, as such was especially important to ensuring a high level of student engagement and passion towards reading. Moreover, I chose to be of the racial, ethnic, cultural, native language, and

gender demographics of my students. I wanted the books in our classroom to serve as vivid and inspiring reflections of who the children were.

School curriculum was an additional area of inquiry within the Goodwin et al. (2006) study. The researchers asked if the instructional materials at the participants' sites were "relevant and responsive to Asian American children" (p. 225). According to nine questionnaire respondents, most of whom taught at schools "with a notable Asian population" (p. 225). Their schools either included curriculum that was culturally meaningful and addressed Asian American students or the teachers themselves created materials which incorporated their personal Asian American heritage. One study participant expressed that the lack of school curriculum regarding the history of Asian Americans further fosters possible racial bias. Moreover, she described her students' knowledge regarding Asians as being limited to what they saw on television, such as their perception of China being based upon martial arts programs or a network news anchor of Chinese descent. Thus, the inclusion of curriculum within U.S. public school classrooms that reflects the Asian American experience matters.

A specific avenue by which some of the Asian American teachers in the study engaged in educational change was through curriculum. According to Goodwin et al. (2006), they made direct connections between instructional materials and their racial and ethnic backgrounds. For instance, one of the study participants brought into her classroom objects that she acquired when visiting her homeland of India. Thus, Asian American educators can serve as facilitators of primary learning resources to create and develop more thoughtful and accurate curricula regarding the Asian American experience.

Milner (2010) describes an African American high school English teacher at a suburban campus in the Midwest, whereby 86% of the student population is White. Regardless of the demographics, this teacher designs and implements curricula that she believes will enable her students to develop a sense of awareness and knowledge of self that can help them to understand “the other” better. The teacher states:

They need to know...I try to go beyond Euro-centric literature. Most of the contributors to literature were made by White men. The main thing I consider, besides my kids, then, is the importance of exposing the kids to writers who make up the world: the Hispanics and the Hispanic Americans, the Asians and the Asian Americans, the Africans and the African Americans...Women – women are also important because most of the writers were White men. I want my girls to read about women, too. I try to broaden their horizons. They are on their way out into the real world, and everybody they meet in the world might not look like the people here. To me, that is what is important in the decision making. (p. 53)

Moreover, the teacher expresses, “If I were an Asian student, I would want my teacher to know something about Asian writers” (p. 56).

Do Filipino American teachers think that Filipino Americans are absent in the preK-12 public school curriculum? Are Filipino American teachers including the Filipino American experience within their classroom instruction? According to Halagao et al. (2009), there are some Filipino American secondary school teachers in the U.S. who are making an effort to do so. For example, in the state of Virginia a Filipina American high school history teacher incorporates resources like Filipino American film, books, and oral histories when creating curriculum and teaching lessons that are based upon state standards and inclusive of Filipino American history.

During a conversation with Reggie, he expressed his view that it is important for Filipino American history to be taught. In its absence at their school sites, both Reggie and Theresa chose to bring their Filipino American students to local cultural education

conferences and events that enabled their middle and high school students to celebrate and engage in learning about Filipino American culture, history, and identity. Is this a belief embraced by other Filipino American teachers?

Being Called to Lead

During a conversation with Reggie, he shared that his wife, also a Filipino American teacher, was an instrumental person in establishing the teaching of native Filipino language and culture classes within the San Diego Unified School District. Her pioneering efforts led to other Filipino language and culture courses being taught in additional school districts in the state of California. In these secondary school elective courses, Filipino and non-Filipino students had the opportunity to learn one of the languages of the Philippines, and about the nation's history, traditional culture and customs of the Filipino people, including that of family values, food, and dance.

In spite of Filipino language and culture classes existing in California for over two decades, the future of these courses was uncertain with the passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2001. Within the provisions of the national legislation, K-12 public school teachers in the United States had to be deemed "highly qualified" to teach in their respective subject areas. This designation was determined via examinations and university and teacher credential coursework. At that time, neither did a Filipino language college major exist at an institution of higher learning on the U.S. mainland, nor was there a subject matter examination for Filipino language in the state of California. Therefore, there was no avenue by which aspiring Filipino language teachers could meet the NCLB mandate of "highly qualified" status. Moreover, with the current pool of

teachers of Filipino language anticipated to retire within the next five or so years, the future of the state's K-12 Filipino language and culture classes was in jeopardy.

Being a Filipino American teacher can call one into an unexpected leadership role. In October of 2004, I was asked to co-present information and data regarding Filipino language teachers and courses in California before officials of the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC). In addition, during the meeting, I served as the primary spokesperson for two professional Filipino American educator groups, requesting the creation of a subject matter examination in Filipino language. I explained to the CCTC officials that such a pathway was needed for teachers of Filipino language to be deemed "highly qualified," as required by No Child Left Behind.

At the onset, undertaking this particular leadership role seemed "out of place" for me. I was an urban elementary school teacher and did not speak or write any of the over one hundred native Filipino languages. This was due to my parents choosing not to teach them to me and my three siblings because my mother and father experienced racism when they immigrated to the United States from the Philippines. My parents thought it was best for their children to be fully "American," which included being without a certain foreign accent that could result in being subject to ridicule and discrimination. Their decision to "protect" me, my sister, and brothers, resulted in three Filipino languages (Ilocano, Pangasinan, and Tagalog) being lost in my family within one generation. Yet, in spite of my initial reservations, I served as a Filipino American teacher leader within the CCTC meeting because a first-generation Filipino American language teacher and elder asked this leadership role of me. An elder Filipino language teacher told me, "You know

how to talk to them [CCTC staff]. We [first-generation Filipino language teachers] don't.”

Following this, I led the Filipino American community effort to move a bill through the state legislature that would require a state assessment to determine the “highly qualified” status of Filipino language teachers. This historic native language law, the only one of its kind in the U.S., required the CCTC to develop and administer a subject matter examination for Filipino language. An additional outcome of the legislation was that it served as a pathway for the teaching of other native languages in California schools, including Arabic, Farsi, Hmong, and Vietnamese.

Being a Filipino American teacher can mean being called to lead, and in this particular case, on behalf of the Filipino American community. The Old English origin of *lead* or *laedan* is to “bring forth” and “carry” (Online Etymology Dictionary). As a Filipino American teacher, I was asked by elder, first-generation Filipino language teachers to lead a movement, to bring to the forefront the urgent need for a state education policy, one which would address the future of the teaching of Filipino language and culture classes in California’s K-12 public schools. I undertook this role carrying within me a great sense of responsibility, knowing that Filipino language teachers founded the courses and that I was selected for the unprecedented, policymaking task to preserve these classes for future generations of public school students. Moreover, as a Filipino American daughter I felt a deep sense of cultural loss being only a native English speaker, as being monolingual precluded me from communicating with first-generation elders within my own family. Leading the Filipino Language Movement also granted me

the opportunity to serve as an example of a potential impact upon families and communities when native languages are devalued and lost.

Do Filipino American teachers find themselves in certain leadership roles because of their racial, ethnic, and cultural background? Is being a Filipino American teacher leader a role that is embraced by Filipino American teachers? What does it mean to be a Filipino American teacher leader?

Being Seen Differently

In contrast to the experiences described by some Asian American teachers as being viewed as professionally “incompetent” by white parents (Goodwin et al., 2006), there were also study participants who purported that parents who were Asian American and of additional racial and ethnic minority backgrounds, viewed the Asian American teachers as “more capable and certainly approachable” (Goodwin et al., p. 230). In addition, “their presence as Asian American teachers enabled parents of color to feel more connected to schools” (p. 230). Moreover, the language abilities of half of the Asian American study participants, particularly in Spanish, helped to facilitate a greater sense of connection with Asian American and Latino families.

Goodwin et al. (2006) wrote that one study participant remarked that the lack of Asian American teachers in America’s K-12 schools was a concern. For the individual claimed that Asian children needed Asian American teachers to serve as their “advocates” (Goodwin et al., p. 224). The mid-14th Century origin of *advocate*, or *advocare*, is “to call” (Online Etymology Dictionary), reflecting the notion of a certain calling to provide care. Moreover, the Middle English etymology is to be “one who intercedes for another,” a “protector, champion, patron.”

Are Filipino American teachers called to be advocates for Filipino American children and their families? Does the presence of Filipino American teachers engender a greater sense of school connectedness and community for families of color? Are Filipino American teachers viewed by parents of color as having a greater capability to perform their professional duties, and being more open and welcoming than White teachers?

When I served as an elementary school Special Education instructional assistant, I unexpectedly found myself *being* an advocate for Filipino American students with special needs. For example, during a Special Education Family Night at Benjamin Elementary, a Filipino mom expressed to me with a genuine sense of sadness and guilt: “What did we do wrong?” She perceived that she and her husband were somehow “at fault” for their son’s intellectual disability. In addition, she exuded a feeling of shame regarding her child receiving special education services. As a Filipino American daughter, who is culturally seen and judged as being a direct extension of my mom, dad, and their parenting, I truly understood her perspective. For a Filipino American child to be identified as having special needs, particularly within the prevailing myth of the Asian American Model Minority, readily places a heavily stigmatized shame upon a Filipino American family’s name.

Therefore, with great care, I compassionately responded to the Filipino mother: “You did not do anything wrong. All of us learn differently. By working together, we can ensure that your son will continue to grow and progress academically.” She had tears in her eyes as she hugged me, for I had lifted a culturally-based burden off her shoulders. In that moment, her son was no longer seen as being “less than” a non-Special Education student. “Thank you,” she said softly.

Levin (2003) writes: “Compassion, or solicitude, essentially involves an awareness of universality and wholeness; we are not alone; and we are not whole, without caring for others” (p. 97). Moreover, that “Being moved by such compassion, we are allowing *a new body of understanding* to emerge: a body whose movement consists...in being moved by *grace* of Being as a whole” (p. 98). My physical presence as a Filipino American instructor seemed to provide a comforting, cultural opening through which my student’s mother could emerge with a new and fuller understanding of her son’s learning needs. In addition, through both body and mind (thought), I had the unique opportunity to serve as a cultural bridge, or “Care-structure” (p. 99), between a traditional Filipino view of learning and formal schooling in the U.S., particularly as Special Education services are not part of the educational system in the Philippines. That interaction represented a stirring movement within me as well, drawing me closer to choosing to be a Filipino American teacher.

A Phenomenological Exploration on its Way

The initial exploration above reflects the limited documented voices of Asian American teachers in K-12 public education classrooms in the United States. Moreover, particularly resoundingly absent to me, are the voices of Filipino American teachers. Therefore, through my pursuit of a hermeneutic phenomenological study, I seek to provide a medium through which the lived experiences of Filipino American teachers can be meaningfully discovered and thoughtfully revealed.

Searching for Reflections

In multiethnic communities, it is critical that students have role models. Also, Asians – students and parents – find it easier to relate to me. So, role models are important. They can realize that they too can pursue teaching. When I was in elementary school, I never thought of myself as a teacher. So, my *being* [italics added] a teacher provides a seed. Perhaps the seed can grow into a flower. (Goodwin et al., 2006, p. 229)

The thoughts above are a Korean American teacher's childhood memory of not ever envisioning himself as a teacher due to the absence of Asian American teachers in his classrooms growing-up. This notion can be explored through the concept of *reflections*. During my thirteen years of primary and secondary education, I saw no reflections of myself as an Asian American at the front of public school classrooms. Moreover, my sole teacher of color was African American. Was I implicitly being told that Asian Americans are not meant to be K-12 teachers? Specifically, within my own ethnic community, did Filipino Americans serve as teachers, counselors, and principals? During my childhood of formal education, Filipino American teachers poignantly did not exist.

Look at me,
I will never pass
For a perfect bride,
Or a perfect daughter
Can it be
I'm not meant to play this part?
Now I see
That if I were truly to be myself,
I would break my family's heart

Who is that girl I see
Staring straight back at me?
Why is my reflection someone I
don't know?

Somehow I cannot hide
Who I am, Though I've tried
When will my
Reflection show who I am
inside?
When will my reflection show
Who I am inside?
(Zippel, 1998)

According to Chinese folklore, Hua Mulan was a heroine who courageously took the place of her father in an all-male army. The lyrics above represent an effort to give context to a cinematically-created character of Mulan in the Walt Disney animated film which drew from the legend. The words are from the movie's song "Reflection," whereby the character struggles with the notion of the traditional roles of women within her culture and society as she cannot seem to fit within them. Moreover, she finds that her sense of *self* does not reflect family expectations – a situation that appears to bring her a deep feeling of grief. It is within this fictionally-depicted pain of a young Asian woman searching for worldly reflections of her true sense of outward identity, that I find a profound connection.

One way in which I, a Filipino American daughter, was expected to reflect well upon my family and bring them a sense of honor and pride, was through my chosen career. My journey towards pursuing the profession that truly reveals *who I am*, took me into adulthood continuing to search for *reflections* of Filipino Americans in the field of education. These same images of *my self*, absent during my elementary, middle, and high school years, proved to be missing well into my experiences as a student in teacher education and my doctoral journey.

Moreover, looking beyond my experiences, there are Asian Americans who found their sense of professional purpose and personal happiness as teachers. One Asian American teacher expressed: “Teaching gave her a powerful voice, an opportunity to speak out on behalf of the need for many voices, an opportunity to be a role model, and an opportunity to change the status quo” (Goodwin et al., 2006, p. 228). In addition, she remarked, “I think [I chose] teaching over anything else because it’s knocking down a lot of stereotypes that I hate” (p. 228).

Asking Filipino American Teachers to Reflect Upon Themselves

Filipino American teacher, Teresa, expressed during a conversation with me that part of her happiness as an educator stems from watching her Filipino immigrant students grow in confidence as they integrate into the American education system.

This is what I most want
unpursued, alone
to reach beyond the light
that I am furthest from.

And for you to shine there-
no other happiness-
and learn, from starlight,
what its fire might suggest.
(Mandelstam, 2004)

Will other Filipino American teachers describe being fulfilled in their classrooms and on their school sites? What brings them a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction? Does their career choice reflect what they “most want[ed],” as expressed in Mandelstam’s poem, *This* (2004)? Yet, has their journey been pursued relatively “alone,” without Filipino American colleagues? Do Filipino American teachers view themselves as existing beyond Asian American stereotypes, “reach[ing] beyond the light...furthest from”

traditional Asian American careers in the STEM fields? Are Filipino American teachers sources of “starlight,” serving as agents of change?

Thus, through the research methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology, I delve into the lived experiences of *Being* a Filipino American teacher, to reflect upon and voice the classroom, school site, and community moments of teachers – a lifeworld which has yet to be explored both formally and through a scholarly lens. In Chapter Two, I turned to existing research and narratives, albeit limited in relation to the Asian American diaspora, for insights as to the experiences of Asian American K-12 teachers in U.S. schools. Their encounters particularly reflected corporeal and relational existentials, meanings of existence that were poignantly impacted by culture, race, and ethnicity.

In addition, I found some of the existing literature tends to generalize and aggregate Asian American values and points of view. For example, some scholars purport that the Confucian tradition has an over-arching influence upon Asian Americans’ educational perspectives. This generalization, however, is not applicable to Filipinos, as Catholicism and additional Christian doctrines (e.g. Protestantism), not Confucian teachings, play a rather significant role in the lives of Filipinos as a result of over three hundred years of colonization of the Philippines by Spain and the United States. Furthermore, such monolithic research findings seemed to discount the fact that in some cases the participants in the studies disproportionately overrepresented a particular Asian ethnic group and/or immigrant generation. This tendency to homogenize Asian Americans can be problematic as these distinctive cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and immigrant identities can profoundly impact perspectives regarding teaching and professional classroom and school site experiences.

Therefore, in Chapter Three, I turn back to my guiding question – **What is the lived experience of Filipino American Teachers in preK-12 public schools in the United States?** Furthermore, in the next chapter I illuminate the philosophical groundings that serve as a further foundation for my lifeworld exploration. By doing so, I intend to reveal and render life experiences that are distinctive and unique to *Being* a Filipino American teacher.

CHAPTER THREE: PHILOSOPHIC FOUNDATIONS FOR THE STUDY OF BEING A FILIPINO AMERICAN TEACHER

What does it mean to *be* a Filipino American preK-12 teacher? Is it an existence that is distinctive from educators of other racial and ethnic backgrounds? The Latin origin of *existence* is *existere*, meaning to “stand forth” (Online Etymology Dictionary). In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks (1994) writes that during her childhood, “For black folks teaching – educating – was fundamentally political because it was rooted in antiracist struggle” (p. 2) – reflecting a stand for racial equality. What does teaching *mean* to Filipino American teachers? Moreover, *existere* is defined as an emergence or arising. In light of the limited number of Filipino American teachers in U.S. primary and secondary public school classrooms, what calls an individual of Filipino American background to *be* in a profession that is typically non-traditional for persons of Asian descent in the United States? What does it mean for Filipino American teachers to emerge within classrooms and on school sites, particularly as the teacher racial demographic is predominately White?

This study represents a phenomenological journey for me, one that is both personal and professional as a Filipino American teacher. It is grounded upon my desire to enable *voice* regarding the lived experiences of Filipino American teachers, a perspective within preK-12 public education in the U.S. that has limited research, as evidenced by my exploration in Chapter Two. In addition, I seek to provide a sightline by which Filipino American teachers can be distinctly *seen* from among their fellow Asian American colleagues, thereby uncovering the unique *lifeworld* of Filipino American teachers.

In *Researching Lived Experience*, Max van Manen (1997) writes about the supposed quest of Greek philosopher, Diogenes, to find “*real* human beings” (p. 5). Diogenes walked about during a clear day with a lantern he lit, expressing to the persons he encountered his sense of loss at not finding any humanity around him. The apparent efforts of Diogenes reflect an intentional aim to question, “What is the nature of human being?” (p. 5). In response, van Manen contends that “A human being is not just something you automatically *are*, it is also something you must try to *be*” (p. 5).

Shine
 Light will shine on you
 When you decide to let it
 Instead of hiding.
 (A Pox On All Rainclouds, 2014)

It is with such a directed sense of questioning intentionality, as also reflected in the words of the poem *Shine* (2014), that I thoughtfully seek to “shine a light” upon the lived experiences of Filipino American teachers, desiring to uncover what is currently hidden by the near absence of literature on teachers of this racial and ethnic background and identity. Moreover, I choose to do so, situated within a *human science* approach, and specifically through *hermeneutic phenomenology*. My research methodology reflects my aspirations to dwell thoughtfully among, mindfully reflect upon, and engagingly pursue the unveiling of possible structures of meaning for *Being* a Filipino American preK-12 public school teacher in the United States.

Why Hermeneutic Phenomenology?

In my home state of California, certain K-12 public education data are racially disaggregated. For example, according to the State of California Education Data (California Department of Education, 2015), during the 2011-2012 fiscal year, of the over

283,000 primary and secondary public school teachers in the state, 3,983 (1.4%) were of Filipino descent. In contrast, almost 67% of the teachers were White, reflecting nearly 190,000. The Filipino student population that year numbered 157,640. Thus, the statewide ratio of Filipino students to Filipino teachers was 40 to 1, while the ratio for White students to White teachers was 9 to 1. This set of quantitative data may seem quite jarring as to the apparent racial disparities within California's K-12 public education faculty they bring to bear, yet such information is absent of its potential *meaning* on a human level. For example, why do Filipino Americans choose not to be teachers? Moreover, for those limited number of Filipino Americans who choose to enter the teaching profession, what does it mean to be one of the few?

Seeking to uncover such understanding, I chose to undertake a phenomenological study, rooting my endeavor in human science research – an approach that aims to understand what a phenomenon *means*. Van Manen (1997) writes that “Human science research is concerned with meaning – to be human is to be concerned with meaning, to desire meaning...Desire is...a state of being” (p. 79). Again, I genuinely want to know: What does it *mean to be* a Filipino American teacher? Moreover, human science research is grounded upon the questioning of how we as human beings experience and know our world. Human life is seen as a phenomenon to be understood.

Serving as a Filipino American teacher for fourteen years has truly special meaning for me. In some moments, I was seen as a rare, Filipina American teacher-role model. At other times, regardless of my racial and ethnic background, I was honored to be mistakenly called “mom” in the classroom. Perhaps, such unexpected expression was a reflection of my genuine care and my efforts to facilitate a nurturing, safe, and

structured environment in which students could thrive and grow academically and personally. Yet, what does it *mean* to other Filipino American teachers? What do they experience in their lifeworlds? How does this existence as a Filipino American teacher manifest itself?

I am driven by a passion and desire to know and understand the meaning of this human phenomenon, additionally reflecting human science research as an act of care. Yet, what can the notion of care mean in this phenomenological undertaking?

Make your caring full
 Full of love and compassion
 Full of grace and sincerity
 Full of charity and courage
 Full of energy and dignity
 Full of courtesy and respect
 Full of gentleness yet powerful
 And your caring
 Will be fulfilling.
 (Weir, n.d.)

In her poem “Carefull,” Cecelia Weir calls us to *care fully*, as reflected through such attributes as caring with a fullness of “energy and dignity,” and a “gentleness” that is “powerful.” In addition, she writes that by doing so, one’s intent and effort of care ultimately will result in an outcome in which care is “fulfilling” – implying that care is a reciprocal act between the giver and receiver. It is with such a full commitment, both personally and professionally to “carefull” exploration, that I further aim to unveil thoughtfully that “which is most essential to being” (van Manen, 1997, p. 5) a Filipino American teacher.

A Search for Being

The *question* [emphasis added] of Being is a *distinctive* one.
(Heidegger, 1927/1993, p. 45)

As I seek to understand the meaning of being a Filipino American teacher, I look to the work of Martin Heidegger. According to Heidegger, it is through *questioning* that a search for *Being* begins. In *Being and Time*, he writes that this quest involves searching “for beings in their thatness and whatness” (p. 45), an embarking upon queries reflecting a desire to know. Moreover, in this study I additionally seek to undertake a meaning-full pursuit of the *existence*, or *Da-Sein* (p. 48), of Filipino American teachers. For *Being* encompasses an *existential* comprehension: a being conscious of one’s own existence and an openness to the possibilities of all being and existence; and an understanding of the *meaning structures* of that being’s existence – its *Da-sein*. In the search to discover Being, Heidegger asks that we first show *Da-sein* “in its average *everydayness*” (p. 60), for by doing so, those structures that are essential to the Being of a being can be uncovered. He is therefore inviting us to attend “To the things themselves!” (p. 81), as they authentically exist in their daily world, a call to *re-turn* towards a phenomenon itself, as desired by Heidegger’s mentor and colleague Edmund Husserl. To do so means to be “concerned with concrete acts of meaning...essential, intentional, a priori structures,” whereby “[p]henomenology fixes these meanings by going back to the a priori connections between acts which intend meanings and those acts which confirm meanings, meaning-fulfilments” (Moran, 2000, p. 93). Therefore I ask: *What* does being a Filipino American teacher *mean*? Is *that* lived experience and existence distinctive from teachers of other races and Asian ethnicities?

During my first five years as an urban school teacher of color, I primarily served African American, Mexican American, and Southeast Asian children and families. The majority of the faculty at my inaugural school site were Mexican American women, and the student population was over 90% Latino. In this space, I initially felt like an outsider. *Being* a Filipina American woman, I was not sure that I belonged in the community. Should my students be taught by a teacher of their own racial and ethnic background, and a native Spanish speaker? The school principal told me during my job interview that it was important for the children to be with English-speaking role models as well. Therefore, I sought to embrace my place at Gomez Elementary School¹⁸. To me, doing so meant moving beyond my classroom space.

In exploring the notion of space, Casey (2009) cites the words of Yi-Fu Tuan, a geographer: “When space feels thoroughly familiar to us, it has become place” (p. 28). Being a Filipina American teacher in this urban, predominately Latino immigrant community primordially meant being present with and authentically establishing my existence and place among my students and their families. In my aim to do so, I chose to conduct home visits prior to the traditional, school site parent-teacher conferences, enabling me to seek familiarity in this new space as I more fully experienced my students and their families within their neighborhood and homes. Over time, and through my instructional, relational, and leadership efforts with students, parents and staff, both within and outside of my classroom, I cultivated and grounded my place as a Filipino American teacher serving the Gomez Elementary community.

¹⁸ Pseudonym

Heidegger asks us to move beyond describing a phenomenon as we may see it, for in its visual presentation it may conceal its true self. Thus, he calls us to engage in *hermeneutic phenomenology*, interpreting the manifestation of what appears, as the phenomenon shows itself, in one's search to render the truth (Heidegger, 1927/1993). Moreover, van Manen (1997) writes that hermeneutic phenomenology moves beyond solely describing an experience as it was lived, for this interpretative research methodology aims to uncover the meaning of a phenomenon. Hermeneutic phenomenology is not merely a "*pointing to something*" in the world, it is a "*pointing out the meaning of something*" (p. 26).

Heidegger believes that the means by which a phenomenon may be unveiled is through *logos*, which he characterizes as "discourse" (Moran, 2000, p. 229), whereby language, or speech, serves for persons as a pathway that opens up and "lets something be seen" (Heidegger, 1927/1993, p. 79). Through these home visits, I sought an opportunity to engage in dialogue with my students' families early on in the school year, desiring to establish a vital educational partnership with them, knowing that such is important to the academic and social growth of their child. Residential visits were a time when I could learn more about and more authentically *see* and experience the students and families I served, as our conversations took place within the comfort and safety of their homes. Furthermore, it was a time for me to listen to family voices and hear the hopes and dreams for their child.

Being a Filipina American teacher at Gomez Elementary meant choosing to transcend the formal, physical boundaries of the school site. My efforts to connect genuinely and dialogue with my school community beyond the campus gates, garnered

me a rapport with my students, their families, and the school faculty and staff grounded in care, respect, and admiration. Many of my colleagues did not feel “safe” to venture into the neighborhood. However, in doing so, I nurtured my being and meaning as a Filipina American teacher, enabling me to thrive, professionally and personally, in this special place.

Being Conflicted

As I embarked upon this phenomenological journey, I thoughtfully embraced Heidegger’s philosophical call to engage with a phenomenon in its primal state (Safranski, 1998), encountering it as its authentic self, whereby authenticity is “resist[ing] the tendency to escape, to evade” (p. 163). Moreover, according to Heidegger, if “Dasein discovers the world in its own way...and brings it close...it discloses to itself its own authentic Being” (1927/1962, p. 167). Thus, as I seek to understand the lived experience of Being a Filipino American teacher in its meaning-full, structural existence, or *Da-sein*, I sought to be inclusive of this phenomenon’s *historicity*. In doing so, I recognize the potential impact of tradition and history upon the Being of a being (Heidegger, 1927/1993), and I am mindful of such as I dwell within and reflect upon the lifeworld of Filipino American teachers.

As I *re-turn* to my own background as a Filipino American teacher, I am initially overshadowed by my parents’ traditional Filipino views of what professions were “best” for me as their daughter, particularly how they emphasized their staunch belief that careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics were the most respectable and lucrative. No one in my family served as a public school teacher. When attending family gatherings, first generation Filipino American elders outspokenly lauded the

children who pursued accounting, engineering, and medical degrees. In my case, my parents made an exception when I planned to attend law school. When I later chose to earn a teaching credential, they did not hide their disappointment. In spite of their vocal objections, I moved forward intently to that which called to me professionally: teaching. Have other Filipino American teachers encountered similar discouragement and doubt within their families? How do Filipino American teachers overcome and transcend such traditional cultural and generational resistance?

Although Heidegger's phenomenological philosophy serves as a grounding for my study, at the same time, I am sorely conflicted as a person of color who has experienced racism and marginalization throughout my lifetime, in fully knowing that Heidegger was an outspoken member of the Nazi Party (Moran, 2000). Moreover, he served as a leader within the institutional apparatus of Jewish removal and exclusion from the university system as rector at the University of Freiberg (Safranski, 1998). How could a man who asks us to question thoughtfully and meaningfully dwell within the everyday existence of a lived experience be silent with regards to the systematic efforts of the National Socialist Revolution to annihilate the Jewish race (Moran, 2000)? While turning to him as a philosopher to ground my study, how do I come terms with a man with such abhorrent human failings?

It has been described that Heidegger viewed the rise of the National Socialist Revolution as Germany's destiny (Moran, 2000; Safranski, 1998). Such a perspective brings to mind America's historic ideology of *Manifest Destiny*: the belief that expanding the territory of the United States to the west was a divine, God-given mission to "civilize" the "savage" Indians (Stephanson, 1996). This "destiny" was systematically and

institutionally carried out by the United States government and military, under a dogmatic philosophy which lawfully justified the seizure of Native American lands and the redistribution of such vast territories to White settlers. In addition, Manifest Destiny granted legal grounds for the forcible relocation of American Indians from their homes to desolate, undesired lands, or reservations. This was a violent, U.S. military-led process of removal that resulted in Native American deaths (Wilson, 1999). For example, it is estimated that during the Trail of Tears, a distance of over 1,200 miles, the Cherokees lost over 5,000 tribe members as they fell victim to disease and starvation during the march. In addition, the death toll among the Creeks was 3,500 of the 15,000 impelled to leave their homeland (History, n.d.).

Under the leadership of multiple U.S. presidents, including Andrew Jackson, William McKinley, and Theodore Roosevelt, there existed a tenor within the nation reflecting a zealous, “destined” call to solve America’s government-deemed “Indian problem” (History, n.d.). The cry that “the only good Indian was dead” was pervasive (Wilson, p. 312, 1999). Furthermore, Manifest Destiny gave rise to the creation of Indian boarding schools, whereby education became the means by which to deculturalize Native American youth, stripping away from children their indigenous ways of being through such forced actions as removing them from their families, altering gender roles (e.g. dismissing American Indian women from their traditional roles as leaders within tribes), and eradicating native languages (Spring, 2007).

America’s Manifest Destiny was a global pursuit, whereby the notion of the United States being a world model, reaching out in the purported spirit of non-isolationism for the claimed great cause of “liberating” and “civilizing” the “savages”

was carried abroad (Stephanson, 1996). For example, the ideology traversed west, beyond the continental United States as it crossed the wide expanse of the Pacific Ocean to the Philippines. On December 10, 1898, the Treaty of Paris transferred the Philippines as a colony of Spain to the American government (San Buenaventura, 1998). United States Senator Albert Beveridge proclaimed: “The Philippines are ours forever... We will not renounce our part in the mission of our race, trustee under God, of the civilization of the world” (Government Printing Office, 1900). Moreover, Beveridge described the Philippine people as “a barbarous race” (San Buenaventura, 1998, p. 3). Native Filipinos were often referred to as being akin to American Indians. For example, Theodore Roosevelt called Filipinos ‘wild and ignorant,’ ‘savages,’ ‘Apaches,’ and ‘Sioux’ (Williams, 1980, p. 825). As I wrote in Chapter 1, the colonization of the Philippines by the United States in the latter’s quest to “civilize the savages,” was promulgated via the creation of a system of educational institutions throughout the Philippines, schools which were staffed by U.S. teachers and taught American culture and values, Christianity, and the English language to Philippine children.

It is in moments such as these, that perhaps we are embracing Heidegger’s notion of *historicity* - acknowledging as a people the potential impact of tradition and history on our sense of *Being* as a nation. Yet, we can also be open to the *horizon* (Heidegger, 1927/1993), the rather limitless potential of our temporal being. Thus, in spite of the numerous indictments one can cite of the United States’ evident betrayal of its proclaimed republican democratic ideals, including the systematic, forcible movement of American Indians onto reservation lands by the U.S. government and military, and the United States’ colonialization of the Philippines and its institutional efforts to “civilize”

the Philippine people, I, as a U.S. citizen, still choose to participate actively within our democratic system and institutions.

Therefore, in choosing Heidegger for my philosophic groundings, I neither ignore his reprehensible actions as a Nazi, nor do I silence the profoundness of his phenomenological teachings. Instead, I look to Heidegger as a poignant reminder of how we, in our humanness, can indigently fall short of *being* human, particularly if we succumb to inhumane ideologies. Perhaps it could be that by drawing on Heidegger's sense of "historicity" and "horizon" (Heidegger, 1927/1993) it will help to bring forth the limitless potential of temporal being, and thus, the temporal being of Filipino American teachers.

Breaking the Silence

In the documentary *Silent Sacrifices: Voices of the Filipino American Family* (Heras, 2001), the project participants began their dialogue with an initial question: "What does it mean to be a Filipino American?" This query was posed to a pair of focus groups, framed in the piece as being two distinct "voices" of Filipino Americans. One group was comprised of first generation Filipino American parents who were reared in the Philippines and immigrated to the United States. The second involved Filipino American youth, young people predominately reflecting Filipino Americans of the second generation who were born and educated in the U.S. The film began with the Filipino American parents dialoguing exclusively with one another about their experiences living in the United States and of them raising children within American society. The Filipino American youth observed this interaction, and the next gathering involved the young people reflecting upon what the parent group said. In doing so, the

youth participants shared their personal experiences and insights regarding growing up as a Filipino American child within a traditional Filipino cultural household and being formally educated in the United States.

Florian, a first-generation Filipino American father, expressed:

What we are doing is we are pushing our kids to do well in school, to get all this education is to compete, to be able for them to compete in [the] world. Because again, looking at our colors, we know it's always going to be racism there all the time. But we know that in order to compete, you have that education in you. That they can't kick you around. And I think it's a fear for Filipino parents, and you're putting stress on yourself and to the children. But I think that's only the best we know how. As again, back to our generation, you'[v]e always been told that education is the best that you can get and it's always free. When I mean free, that it's always there for you.

A different point of view regarding the American education system was given by

Antoinette, a second generation Filipina American university undergraduate:

Just being part of the educational system, and being within the institution of school is to me very, very American because our values are so different. And I think that's where the sources of conflict come of being Filipino and trying to keep my values of my commitment to my family. But the same time, trying to survive in school. I don't think a lot [of] parents know that to go through the educational system in the U.S. is a battlefield every day. At least that's how I see it. I mean our parents push us to succeed in school, to do well, work hard. And I'm sick of this work hard ethic. I work my ass off and I feel like I'm losing who I am.

According to Heras (2001), the Filipino ("our") values that Antoinette refers to include "obedience, closeness to family, and respect for elders," which Heras states "often come into conflict with American values of equality, individualism, self-assertion, and independence." Moreover, during adolescence, in their process of identity development Filipino American young people may question the cultural customs and values of their family, as well as engage in behavior that is different from what is taught and expected within their home.

Furthermore, additionally revealed within the youth dialogue, Antoinette introduces into the conversation an issue within the local Filipino American community: suicide ideation. According to a Centers for Disease Control (CDC) report, Filipino American high school girls within the San Diego Unified School District had higher rates of suicide ideation than boys and their gender peers in other racial categories (Lau, 1995). This CDC finding is generally denied and rejected by first generation Filipino Americans, as Filipino American students are often lauded as academically high-achieving, hard-working children. Yet, Antoinette passionately expresses:

I don't even talk to my parents about my struggles in school. I mean how can I complain to my dad who works two jobs, he had open heart surgery? How can I complain to him when he shouldn't be working anymore? I mean he only gets 5 hours of sleep a night. How am I supposed to come home and tell him about my worries about school? And I'm ready to quit. I want to quit school so bad. And that's what I mean, it's a constant struggle, being in school and trying to balance family at the same time. And there's times I wasn't able to be there for my family, and then dealing with that guilt. And what I'm most sad and frustrated about is *not knowing how we can talk to each other before it's too late*. I mean, how many of you guys ever thought about suicide? Honestly? How many of you? A lot of us have. But do our parents know about it?

At the beginning of the documentary, one of the project participants stated: "We make silent sacrifices for the love of the family" (Heras, 2001). However, Antoinette's sadness and frustration of "not knowing how we can talk to each other before it's too late," reflects a desire to no longer be silent and to break the silence within her family. She wants to speak genuinely, be listened to, and be heard. In her perspective, the absence of an open dialogue can be tantamount to an adolescent Filipino American deciding to inflict physical harm upon herself. Therefore, conversations hold the potential to be life changing, and in this specific cultural context, honest and heartfelt dialogue

between Filipino American parents and their children could ultimately serve as a life sustaining act.

As the dialogue came to a close, Dario, a parent expressed: "...after our conversation, we are all forever changed" (Heras, 2001). His words reflect Gadamer's (1960/1997) view of the power of conversation within the context of hermeneutic phenomenology. In *Truth and Method*, he writes that being in a "successful conversation" (p. 371) is transformational:

...in a successful conversation they both come under the influence of the truth of the object and are thus bound to one another in a new community. To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were. (p. 371)

Moreover, Gadamer (1960/1997) presents the notion that we engage in the hermeneutic experience through the medium of language. In particular, through the art of conversation we seek the meaning and structure of a person's experience – "Erfahrung" (p. 341). He says that it is through conversation that partners create a language that is common to one another. According to Gadamer, a conversation that is genuine is neither conducted between nor led by the partners involved. Moreover, there is no particular foreseen outcome; a conversation goes where it may, and its conclusion is reached on its own accord. It is through such authentic language that "substantive understanding and agreement can take place between two people" (p. 386). He states:

Conversation is a process of coming to an understanding. Thus it belongs to every true conversation that each person opens himself to the other, truly accepts his point of view as valid and transposes himself into the other to such an extent that he understands not the particular individual but what he says. (p. 387)

Silence

When my voice doesn't rise to face the silence

...

It rings empty

(Turn Off The Lights, 2015)

As reflected in the poetry of Turn Off The Lights, the absence of one's voice in the midst of silence can leave a person feeling a sense of emptiness or loss, such as expressed and experienced by Antoinette within her traditional Filipino American family. Yet, how do we break the silence? Moreover, in the case of Filipino American teachers, what could enable their concealed voices to emerge? How can potentially transformative dialogue begin? As was the starting point of the *Silent Sacrifices* conversations, it opens with verbal inquiry.

Opening Conversations: Asking Questions

We cannot have experience without asking questions.

(Gadamer, 1960/1997, p. 356)

I opened my conversation with Reggie by asking the following question: *Can you tell me about your journey as a Filipino American educator?* He initially responded by recalling the moment at the age of four when his sister's kindergarten teacher came to his family's home to speak with his parents. The teacher told his mother and father that his sister's heavy Filipino language accent made it difficult for the teacher to understand her. In addition, she said that English should be practiced in their home. As a result, over time, the presence of the Visayan language diminished in Reggie's household, and he does not have the ability to speak the language today. Thus, as a future Filipino American teacher, Reggie's first encounter with formal education reflected an apparent educational deficit perspective held by a teacher with regards to his family's native language. That powerful childhood memory stayed with Reggie throughout his teaching career.

Gadamer (1960/1997) writes that *hermeneutic experience* encompasses a *hermeneutic consciousness* – one that is open to tradition, the historicity that reflects a culmination of past experience, a “fusion of horizons” (p. 337), including prejudices and judgments, which we each bring to bear in the present and future possibilities. Thus, knowledge, “the understanding of the other person” (p. 352), is not constrained by tradition, but instead given freedom and made possible. Moreover, that openness within hermeneutical consciousness is structured through questions. It is spoken language that facilitates a dialectic “by the way of question and answer,” (p. 357) and thus, it is the question that enables knowledge to be revealed. For “[t]o ask a question means to bring into the open” and “questioning makes the object and all its possibilities fluid” (p. 361).

My initial question to Reggie opened a conversation whereby the lifelong impact of a kindergarten teacher on Reggie and his family’s being and identity as Filipino Americans, particularly with regards to their native language of Visayan, was brought forth. In addition, the memory of this encounter as a child remained with him throughout his lived experiences as a Filipino American teacher. For example, Reggie was reminded of the absence of Filipino language when he could not speak with Filipino students and their families in their native tongue. Yet, he seemed to find a sense of reclamation later when he advocated for the teaching of Filipino language courses on his public school district’s secondary campuses, alongside his spouse, also a teacher of Filipino descent.

What does it mean to *be* a Filipino American teacher? By choosing to ask this question, I seek to break the silence and begin a dialogue with Filipino American teachers and the broader educational community with regards to their lived experiences of being Filipino American teachers. Through questioning, I engage in conversation and listen

with a conscious openness to the unique historicity of the teachers, recognizing that their traditions, including culture, impact their present and future “possibilities of meaning” (Gadamer, 1960/1997, p. 368) of and within their lifeworlds. Moreover, I also am mindful of the fact that I, too, bring into the dialogue my own experiences of being a Filipino American teacher myself. And although I and my co-researchers, my partners in the hermeneutic phenomenological conversations (Gadamer, 1960/1997), share racial, ethnic, cultural, and professional backgrounds, I do not mistakenly assume that our language is common at the onset of our dialogue. For “a conversation has a spirit of its own, that the language in which it is conducted bears its own truth within it...it allows something to ‘emerge’ which henceforth exists” (p. 385). Yet, in order to make sense of what is spoken and thereby reach a fusion of “the hermeneutical horizon” (p. 363), we must “question what lies behind what is said” (p. 363).

Furthermore, I engage in questioning with thoughtfulness as I aim to render the lifeworld of Filipino American teachers. Are there cultural dimensions to being a Filipino American teacher? Do the ethnic traditions of Filipino American teachers impact their *being* in U.S. public schools? Are Filipino American teachers experiencing a sense of exclusion when among their predominately White colleagues? With regards to the teaching and learning of children of color, and in particular, Filipino American children, do Filipino American teachers speak up? If and when they do, are Filipino American teachers heard in the process? According to Heidegger (1927/1993), phenomenology “first...bring[s] beings themselves forward,” then “[t]hese beings must likewise show themselves in the way of access that genuinely belongs to them” (p. 84). Through the structure of questions and the answers that follow, truth and knowledge regarding *being* a

Filipino American teacher can be initially brought forth, and then reflectively rendered through hermeneutic phenomenology's interpretive process.

A Hermeneutic Phenomenology Methodological Structure

Engaging in a human science phenomenological study has been characterized as a difficult undertaking. According to van Manen (1997):

To *do* hermeneutic phenomenology is to attempt to accomplish the impossible: to construct a full interpretative description of some aspect of the lifeworld, and yet to remain aware that lived life is always more complex than any explication of meaning can reveal. (p.18)

Yet, in spite of the depicted enormity of the task, van Manen still encourages its pursuit. He further writes, "But rather than therefore giving up on human science altogether, we need to pursue its project with extra vigour" (p. 18). Furthermore, he provides a methodological structure by which to conduct this research, involving the following six activities:

- (1) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
- (2) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
- (3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
- (4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
- (5) maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
- (6) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (pp. 30-31)

As I elaborate upon each research activity below, I vigorously seek to shine the "lantern's light" upon my hermeneutic phenomenological pathway.

My Turning

Every project of phenomenological inquiry is driven by a commitment of turning to an abiding concern. (van Manen, 1997, p. 31)

The call by van Manen to explore lifeworlds unrelentingly with a heightened sense of intensity, reflects the passion of my turning in Chapter One to the phenomenon

of Filipino American teachers in U.S. public schools. When I began my preK-12 classroom teaching career, Asian American, and more specifically, Filipino American colleagues were visibly few in number. Moreover, during my childhood and adolescence, I neither had a Filipino American nor Asian American classroom teacher. The absence of my reflection in the faces of my teachers over the course of thirteen years of formal schooling, implicitly conveyed a message to me that Asian Americans did not grow up to serve as primary and secondary school teachers.

In *Learning from Latino Teachers* (Ochoa, 2007), Miguel, an elementary school teacher of Mexican descent writes:

When I started to interact with the children, I saw the need for more Latinos in the classroom to teach them about their culture, to show them that it's important, to validate their beliefs and to strengthen them from the beginning...I thought I could be a good role model for them. (p. 118)

Miguel was an undocumented student who began his formal schooling in the United States in the California community of Compton. Miguel's words echo my own with regards to the absence of teachers of our racial and ethnic backgrounds when we were students in preK-12 public education, and our potential impact upon children as teachers of color (e.g. role models), particularly if we share the racial and ethnic culture of our students. Yet beyond personal anecdotes, available state and national demographic data confirm that overall there is a significant lack of teachers of color in America's classrooms. In addition, the current federal government initiative to fund higher education programs, aimed at increasing teacher education program graduates of color, further reflects a larger, systemic concern (Ahmad & Boser, 2014).

Moreover, for those of us who chose to break the Asian American Model Minority prototype of entering careers in the science, engineering, technology, and

mathematics (STEM) fields, and became preK-12 public school teachers, what does it mean to exist in the latter lifeworld? What does it mean to be a Filipino American teacher? The scant references to Filipino American teachers within the limited scope of Asian American teacher research overall, results in the near absence of the experiences of Filipino American teachers in preK-12 public education. Therefore, my first *commitment* is to give voice to and uncover the essence of Being a Filipino American teacher. I believe that it is important for Filipino American teachers to no longer be silent, as from the emerging of their voices we may render an understanding of what their presence means to U.S public school classrooms.

Furthermore, I am ardently committed to expanding within teacher preparation programs the curricular examination of and critical thinking and dialogue regarding the notions of diversity and difference. By striving to include the lived experiences of Filipino American teachers more fully within education research, I seek to enhance the knowledge base of and conversations among future teachers regarding the unique historicity of the Asian American experience in schooling. I believe that it is important for Filipino American teachers to be included in the discussion on diversity within education, an inclusion that recognizes their uniqueness from among the Asian American diaspora. In doing so, it is my hope that preK-12 public school teachers are better prepared to work with colleagues from different backgrounds, and to serve the ever-growing number of racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistically diverse children and families within our nation's primary and secondary public schools.

Experience as Lived

According to van Manen (1997), “The lifeworld, the world of lived experience is both the source and the object of phenomenological research” (p. 53). I began this phenomenological journey in Chapter One by turning to the experiences of two Filipino American teachers who sought to create spaces for Filipino American students in which they could explore their racial, ethnic, and cultural identities. Moreover, Reggie went on to serve the academic, cultural, and social needs of Filipino American parents as they attempted to navigate a foreign U.S. public education system. Furthermore, van Manen writes that our own individual experiences serve as a natural point of departure in phenomenological research. I additionally provided a personal perspective as I experienced being the “other,” a Filipino American urban teacher, serving students and families of racial and ethnic backgrounds different from my own.

To explore this phenomenon further, in Chapter Two I turned to previous studies that sought to examine the experiences of Asian American pre-service and classroom teachers. Themes that emerged included feelings of racial and ethnic isolation among predominately White colleagues, and the questioning of the instructional competence of Asian American teachers by both colleagues and parents based upon speaking English as a second language. Will these particular experiences mirror those of Filipino American teachers? As these studies cumulatively made almost no specific reference to Filipino American teachers, I intentionally dwell within the lifeworld of Filipino American teachers as I engage with study participants, grounding our dialogue in questioning and answering, while being mindfully open to their traditions. In addition, as I did in Chapter One and Two, I continue to bring forth the lived experience by delving beneath the

surface of certain words by etymologically going back to their origins of meaning. By doing so, I embrace “a willingness to live the language of our lives more deeply, to become more truly who we are when we refer to ourselves” (van Manen, 1997, p. 59).

Reflection: The Search for Meaning

...phenomenological research consists of reflectively bringing into nearness that which tends to obscure, that which tends to evade the intelligibility of our natural attitude of everyday life. (van Manen, 1997, p. 32)

According to van Manen (1997), ascertaining a phenomenon’s essence “involves a process of reflectively appropriating, of clarifying, and of making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experience” (p. 77). Moreover, the search for rendering the meaning of lived experience involves analyzing themes. Van Manen (1997) writes that themes within phenomenology are “*structures of experience*...the experiential structures that make up that experience” (p. 79). In addition, as phenomenological themes are pedagogically-oriented, they are self-reflective. “Self-reflection is the manner by which pedagogy tries to come to terms with self...the way in which pedagogy reflects on itself while serving other” (p. 89). For example, as a Filipino American teacher, my Being with students and parents is grounded upon a pedagogical sense, represented by my ongoing interactions with them, situated concretely and relationally, within the context of teaching and whereby that essence is pedagogy.

To guide me in the process of phenomenological reflection, I turn to four “fundamental lifeworld themes...‘existentials’ ” (van Manen, 1997, p. 101). These *existentials* are: “*lived space* (spatiality), *lived body* (corporeality), *lived time* (temporality), and *lived human relation* (relationality or communality).” *Lived space* involves those physical spaces within our world that further enable us to understand an

individual, such as home and church – spaces which may conjure up feelings like comfort and sacredness. Moreover, lived spaces reflect geography, such as cityscapes and landscapes, places that can provide us with a context for making meaning. In addition, lived space encompasses social and cultural attributes, that may impact the quality of an experience. For both Reggie and Theresa, the Filipino American Educator Association was a meaningful space in which they found personal and professional support as Filipino American teachers. Moreover, as members within the organization, they and their Filipino American students participated in conferences and community events that affirmed and showcased the Filipino American culture and identity.

Lived body serves as a phenomenological recognition that we as human beings constantly engage with and in the world in a bodily way. For example, our initial experience with another could be by a glance, smile, or handshake. Yet, according to van Manen (1997), our corporeal presence can be both simultaneously revealing and concealing, either intentionally or unconsciously. When my Latino students at Gomez Elementary initially gazed upon me on the first day of school, they saw me as *being* different. I was not Mexican American, yet I had a Spanish language surname. My physical features as a Filipino American teacher were foreign to them, while at the same time, my students questioned the longevity of my presence at the school. Does Ms. Castillo belong here? Will she stay?

Lived time reflects a temporal perspective, whereby time is in constant motion, captured within the horizons of that which is behind us (past), the now (present), and what is yet to come (future). Understanding a person can involve listening to the story of her/his life as well as asking about her/his hopes for tomorrow. Moreover, time is viewed

from a subjective standpoint, through such characterizations as particular moments seemingly moving at warp speed or at a snail's pace. As an elementary school teacher on a campus with a large Filipino American student population, Theresa spent time with a group of fifth and sixth grade Filipino American students as the founder and advisor for an after school Filipino American program in which they dialogued about topics that mattered to them, including family and Filipino culture and history. For Theresa, those conversational moments "made [her] happy" as a Filipino American teacher, as she observed that the opportunities for the children to be heard and engage in self-exploration facilitated a sense of empowerment for them.

Lived other, or lived human relation, revolves around the maintenance of lived relationships, between those with whom we interpersonally share spaces. This relationality transcends the initial corporeal encounter. For example, by engaging in conversation, we can potentially move beyond the self and genuinely experience the other. Therefore, purpose and meaning can be found within the social and communal. As an elementary school teacher, my students and I began each school day sitting in a morning community circle. In those moments, we verbally and mentally set our intentions for the new day, re-embracing our collective aims of learning together with care and respect for one another as unique individuals. The differences that could possibly set us apart, such as race, ethnicity, gender, and language, temporally fell away as we daily nurtured our human connections within our classroom community.

Lastly, van Manen (1997) states that during the research activity of reflection, one must determine those themes or relationships which are essential to the phenomenon. He writes, "*In determining the universal or essential quality of a theme our concern is to*

discover aspects or qualities that make a phenomenon what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is" (p. 107). Therefore, in identifying the themes that are fundamentally essential, I must ask myself: What enables this phenomenon of Filipino American teachers to be?

Writing and Rewriting

According to van Manen (1997), language serves as the sole means by which experiences of pedagogy are symbolically brought forth. He states that reading and writing give rise to relational conversation, providing a medium through which discourse is maintained. Moreover, he writes that "...for the human sciences, and specifically for hermeneutic phenomenological work, writing is closely fused into the research activity and reflection itself" (p. 125). For writing is a dialectical process, one in which our thoughts are embodied upon paper. In addition, writing enables us to reflect more fully upon the lifeworld in order to determine those structures of experience that are essential to the phenomenon. Writing grants us a sense of distance from the world, its abstractions, and the subjectiveness of the every day experience. Yet, at the same time, writing draws us closer to concrete lived experience as a writer engages in a self-reflective praxis in a quest for understanding and meaning.

Furthermore, writing has the power to enable us to "see" something for the first time, or to understand the object in a new or more profound way. Successful phenomenological text poignantly allows us "to see that which shines through, that which tends to hide itself" (van Manen, 1997, p.130). Such revealing necessitates the process of both writing and rewriting, as the latter's steps of editing and revision can be seen as being akin to an artist attending to her work with great care, thoughtfulness, and depth as

she goes “again and again, now here and then there, back and forth between the parts and the whole” (pp. 131-132). Her desire is a reflective, signature piece. Such is my commitment to bringing forth the lived experiences of Filipino American teachers.

Pedagogical Orientation

To establish a strong relation with a certain question, phenomenon, or notion, the researcher cannot afford to adopt an attitude of so-called scientific disinterestedness. (van Manen, 1997, p. 33)

As previously expressed, my unwavering commitment to a hermeneutic phenomenological study of Filipino American teachers is based upon my desire to give voice to these teachers, to help them to be seen genuinely. Thus, I further approach this study with a commitment to the notions of sight and light as a yogi, one who embraces Namaste: “The light in me *sees* and honors the light in you.” At the end of each yoga practice, my class closes with this verbal exchange, a direct acknowledgment of one another’s unique presence and power, while among other yogis, within this space and at this time. My research passion reflects such an object orientation, one in which I am “animated by the object in a full and human sense” (van Manen, 1997, p. 33).

In addition, a significant undergirding of my engaged pedagogical orientation to the lifeworld of Filipino American teachers, is the limited research on Asian American teachers. Particularly, I found that a number of existing studies tend to generalize and aggregate Asian American values and points of view. For example, as previously brought forth in Chapter Two, some scholars contend that the Confucian tradition has an overarching influence upon Asian Americans’ educational perspectives. Such findings, however, seem to discount the fact that in some cases the study participants disproportionately overrepresented one particular Asian ethnic group and/or immigrant

generation. Furthermore, such accounts disregard the unique historicity of a specific Asian American ethnicity. This, for example, can be seen in the case of Filipinos, for in light of the fact that Spain colonized the Philippines over three hundred years, Roman Catholicism serves a dominant tradition within the country, not Confucian teachings. Therefore, being strongly oriented encompasses not settling for that which is superficial or false. The tendency to homogenize Asian Americans can be problematic, for these distinctive cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and immigrant identities can impact profoundly perspectives regarding teaching and professional classroom and school site experiences.

Balance

As I move forward in this hermeneutic phenomenological undertaking, van Manen (1997) further guides me by asking that I be open to a journey that may take me in a direction that I did not anticipate, off my mindfully planned research course. He writes: “A certain openness is required in human science research that allows for choosing directions and exploring techniques, procedures and sources that are not always foreseeable at the outset of a research project” (p. 162). Moreover, he cautions against not being too fixated upon “the *ti estin*,” the “What is it? What is this phenomenon in its whatness?” (p. 33), and thereby potentially hindering what can powerfully be unveiled through phenomenology. In addition, van Manen asks that we thoughtfully and continually consider the particular parts of the study’s design and implementation within the context of the whole. Striking such a sense of balance will serve to preserve an openness to the lifeworld of Filipino American teachers, and the rendering of the unfixed and limitless *horizons of understanding* that may be unconcealed along the way.

As a yogi, this phenomenological call for balance strongly resonates with me. During my yoga practice, I approach each pose not as an isolated, separate part, but as an aggregating step towards a larger, balanced whole. For example, my sessions do not begin with an inverted pose, but will instead start and incorporate over the course of the class, those poses that prepare my mind and body for the handstand which is to come. Therefore, there is an ongoing back-and-forth that occurs in order to ensure that there is a foundation and structure upon which the inversion can be revealed fully. It is with such intentionality, self-reflection, and understanding that I will approach this specific research activity.

Method of Engagement

Building upon my initial conversations with two Filipino American teachers, I engaged in dialogue with eight additional preK-12 school public school teachers of Filipino American descent. I found co-researchers through my professional network, which includes the Filipino American Educators Association of San Diego County (FILMEDA). It was my goal to enlist a diversity of personal and professional experiences as possible. In addition, I sought to converse with Filipino American teachers who have taught for at least five years, such that they were beyond the potential stresses and pressures usually associated with being a new or novice classroom teacher, e.g., being of non-tenure status in a school district. Therefore, the following served as my participant criteria:

- 1) Four female and four male Filipino American public school teachers.
- 2) Four primary and four secondary-level teachers.
- 3) Filipino American teachers who have taught for at least five years.

My outreach began with an initial verbal (e.g. phone call) and then a written invitation (see Appendix A) to participate in the study. I first contacted each potential co-researcher by phone or email in order to schedule a time and place that was convenient and comfortable for both of us to meet. At this in-person meeting, I explained the goal of the study and invited the individuals to be participants. If the individual wanted to participate, I then provided a copy of the study Consent Form (see Appendix B), which we read together and I addressed any concerns or questions the individuals had regarding the study and participation. Afterwards, I asked the individuals to sign the Consent Form and I offered a copy of the document. At the close of the meeting, I scheduled a time and place that was convenient, comfortable, and private for us to meet in order to have our first phenomenological conversation, which took place for approximately one to two hours.

As the questions and answers provide the structure to researching the lifeworld, I thoughtfully anticipated the conversations with the Filipino American teachers that were possibilities. As we do not enter a phenomenological study with a ridged, scripted list of questions, I entered into a dialogue with an openness to asking questions like the following:

- Tell me about your journey to becoming a teacher.
- What does it mean to be a Filipino American teacher?
- Are there cultural dimensions to being a Filipino American teacher?
- Did you experience Filipino American teachers growing-up? Asian American teachers?
- What did their absence or presence in the classroom mean to you?
- What, if any, were the reactions or feelings of your family regarding your decision to become a teacher? Your friends? Others?
- What were your experiences in your teacher preparation program? Were there any specific moments whereby being Filipino American had particular meaning or impact during your schooling?

- How do you experience your students and classroom as a Filipino American teacher? Your colleagues? Your school community?
- What is a significant remembrance in your teaching that reflects how you both see yourself and are seen by others as a Filipino American teacher?

After conducting the initial phenomenological conversation with each teacher, I asked every person to write about and further open up particular moments or topics that emerged during the first dialogue, as based upon my analysis of the session transcript.

For example, Ramos expressed during our first conversation:

I recognize that I'm very American...at the same time I'm not...I had this conversation with somebody recently where I'm Filipino American. I'm not really ...so...Americanized that I recognize myself as...just American...because I have this...otherness. Then I go to the Philippines and it's like, oh no, you're American...it's this...weird sort of in-betweenness.

I asked Ramos to reflect upon and write about her senses of “otherness” and “in-betweenness.” What do they mean to her? How does she feel about being an *other* and *in-between*? The teachers’ written reflections served to provide deeper insights and understandings of their particular lived experiences.

I engaged in a second, in-person conversation for approximately one to two hours. This subsequent conversation served as an opportunity to further unveil the lived experiences of Filipino American teachers. For example, to open the conversation I asked: “What is it like *to live* as a Filipino American teacher?” In addition, based upon the first conversation and written reflection, I also asked questions that were specific to the lived experiences of individual teachers. For instance, I asked Narciso what does it mean to him to be a teacher, as he previously expressed how he feels he is living the career that his mom (formally a teacher in the Philippines) could not professionally live out in the United States.

This conversation was again followed by transcription analysis. I had the audio recordings of the conversations transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. Then I re-listened to the dialogues and reviewed the transcriptions for accuracy and completeness prior to my analysis. As necessary, in order to further open up a certain lived experience revealed during the conversation, a second writing was asked of each teacher. For example, during our second conversation, Gail reflected: “I think...becoming a teacher came out of great, not strife, but searching. And then when I found it, it was like I was at home.” I asked Gail to reflectively write about what it is like to be “at home” as a teacher.

Lastly, based upon my analysis of the dialogues and writing pieces in their entirety, I conducted a group conversation. In doing so, my aim was to explore collectively with the co-researchers the themes, or structures of meaning, that emerged during my dialogues with each individual and within their writing. Therefore, the questions I asked during the group conversation were based upon these themes. They included the following:

- Some of you shared that you identify as a teacher of color. What is it like *to live* as a teacher of color?
- Many of you shared that when Filipino or Asian students see you at your school their eyes light up and they gravitate towards you. What is it like for you *to be seen* by Filipino or Asian students, and in some cases by Filipino or Asian parents, *as being the same* as them?
- A number of you shared that you are not in the profession or at the professional level in education that your parents want for you. What is it like *to live* knowing that your parents see you as “simply being a teacher?”

At the onset of and throughout the group conversation, the study participants were introduced and addressed by their self-selected pseudonym. Moreover, the maintaining of the confidentiality of each person’s identity was verbally reaffirmed. This collective

dialogue reflected an exploration of an aspect of van Manen's (1997) *lived human relation* existential – namely that of uncovering meaning through the communal.

The research activities outlined above represent my engagement with the study participants in “collaborative hermeneutic conversations” (van Manen, p. 99). This process was enabled through multiple dialogues, whereby I and the co-researchers sought to reflect more deeply upon the themes that emerged from the texts of previous conversations (e.g. transcripts) and reflective writing. Thus, beginning with one-on-one dialogues and then culminating with a focus group conversation, we collaboratively and hermeneutically interpreted the structures of meaning that were uncovered during each step of the research process.

Gathering All Together: Meet the Participants

The study's co-researchers are Filipino American teachers who are products of formal K-12 schooling in the United States. Moreover, they earned their undergraduate degrees and teaching credentials in American universities. Generationally, they represent 1.5 and second generation Filipino Americans, either immigrating to the U.S. as young children or are American citizens by birth. The parents of all of the co-researchers were born in the Philippines and immigrated to North America. Lastly, English is the native language of all of the Filipino American teachers in the study.

Coletrane¹⁹

Coletrane represents the most senior of the Filipino American teachers in the study, serving as a secondary level teacher for 31 years. Beginning as a high school

¹⁹ Each teacher in the study self-selected a pseudonym.

music teacher, he later moved to the middle school setting to accept a biology position as he possessed a teaching credential in both subject areas.

Learning to play his first instrument at the age of 12, Coletrane expresses that being a music teacher means:

I'm giving my best, because music was my best thing I could do in my life. It...is the only thing I know I could do naturally. ...I learned how to play all the instruments [including]...piano...clarinet...music, it...was probably the best thing I could give to the world...share my music, share...what I learned with you and be at the level where we could talk one on one about any type of music...I think that was the thing I wanted to offer to kids...sharing my experiences with them and this was the best thing I could do as [an] individual.

After two years teaching music at Del Sol High²⁰, Coletrane believed that it was best to accept a science position at Bay View Middle School²¹. "I was hurt a little bit for a long time because...I'm a musician," he reflects. However, the stress associated with overseeing the high school band when they performed at athletic events and music festivals, and the administrative coordination such participation required (e.g. parents, fundraising), were additional tasks that he no longer wished to undertake.

Coletrane's transition to science instruction evolved over time as he sought to transform his curriculum from a solely text-based focus to hands-on, tactile-kinesthetic learning. His creation and incorporation of applied learning included such opportunities as dissections, exploratory labs, and a day-long ecological field study at a local chaparral. His efforts were recognized by students and parents as he was told, "This is her favorite class now, hands down. He goes...they always hated science in elementary school, but they sure like your class." Moreover, Coletrane shares:

I had very strong experiences in science and I think that's why it made me stick around because...a couple of years down the road after I left music...the new

²⁰ Pseudonym

²¹ Pseudonym

principal asked me, “The band job is open again. Would you like to take it?” I said, “No. I think I found my niche here for a while. I’m having a great time doing this.” And the principal goes, “I agree.”

The predominate racial student demographic at Coletrane’s middle school was Latino. During the 2013-14 school year, Latino students represented 85% of the campus’ population of over 1,100. Students of Filipino descent numbered 18 (Ed-Data, 2019). It was in this racial context that Coletrane found himself as a Filipino American teacher being asked by students: “What are you?”

Ramos

Ramos has been a high school English teacher for 20 years. She discovered her rather innate sensibilities to teach while in high school. During a summer marine biology course at a local nature center, her class requirements included teaching middle school students what she had learned. Working collaboratively with two classmates, she created lessons about such topics as fishing and connected them with the center’s exhibits.

Ramos remembers:

...after one visit [by middle school students]...my teacher [came] up to me and said, “Hey, you know this lady...was observing you during the time... [you] were at the petting pool,” and...she had remarked what a great job I had done giving instructions and talking to the students. And I think after that it kind of solidified...that’s [that teaching’s] the pathway.

South Mountain High School²², where Ramos teaches, is a site whereby she was one of the teachers hired to open the campus once the school district completed its construction. The high school has a significant Filipino student population. During the 2015-2016 school year, students of Filipino descent represented 16% of the South

²² Pseudonym

Mountain's nearly 2,600 student population. Since the beginning, Ramos has been very involved in student clubs and organizations, including the drama program. She explains:

I took on the drama program here. There was nothing. ...by the time I finished teaching the classes after three years, I had gotten the program to a point where it was pretty good. And the last show that happened on campus, where I was helping out, I had that student who went to UCLA, he showed up with some of his friends who were also students here. When he was here as a student, there was nothing going on. He came in and saw the show and he was so happy. He was giddy with joy. Like he was hopping and skipping. He's like, oh my God, you guys have microphones and you guys have this and you guys have that, and you guys have actual shows, and the set and this. And to me, I mean that's...definitely a high point. ...I put in a lot of time and effort into it, a lot of work, and I think it's paid off. I mean visibly it's paid off, which is great.

In addition to her leadership in students' extracurricular activities, Ramos serves as resource curriculum specialist for the school's English Department. She reflects: "I take on more work than some of the other teachers...for some reason I'm willing to do it." Moreover, "I don't know if it's because I come from the experience of you really need to work hard...you really need to succeed...you really need to do your best, because we [my parents] sacrificed for you to be here." Her words alluded to her being reared by Filipino immigrant parents – a background and upbringing that has influenced who she is as a Filipino American teacher.

Carmen

Carmen, a twenty-year teacher, is credentialed in the subject areas of United States history and Spanish. Her sense of joy for teaching emerged when she was a child, as she warmly remembers how she was the "teacher" when she and her siblings played together within their imaginary school. In the Philippines, Carmen's mother pursued a teaching degree. According to Carmen, "...she studied to be a teacher, but never realized

it...it was kind of like maybe [I am] fulfilling her dream.” In addition, Carmen feels that being a teacher gives her the opportunity to “make the world a better place.”

She began her classroom teaching career at a high school where the student population and faculty members were predominately White. A friend from her teaching credential program, a Latino male, encouraged Carmen not to stay at the secondary school as he was leaving his teaching position at the campus. She explains: “He warned me not to work here [be]cause the cultural climate was...very pro-White.” As a Filipino American teacher, she described the high school environment as “intimidating,” for a number of the students in her Spanish language class were open about their White supremacy beliefs. For example, some students marked their foreheads with the swastika symbol.

A positive aspect of her time there was that Carmen founded the campus’ first Asian student club and served as its advisor. The club reflected a space and place where students of Asian descent could gather and feel supported. According to Carmen, “...I think it was...a nice thing for the kids to get together and say...we’ve got Asians here.” Carmen’s presence as a Filipino American teacher was valued in this regard, as the students in the club expressed how she would be missed upon her leaving the school.

In contrast, Carmen’s second school, and current site, was more welcoming. The campus is comprised of a significant population of students of Filipino descent. In addition, there are other Filipino American teachers at the middle school as well. One Filipina American teacher in particular, who taught the Filipino Language and Culture Class, took Carmen under her wing and mentored her. Through that professional relationship, Carmen felt inspired and was introduced to a Filipino American Educators

Association (FAEA) in the local community. As Carmen's skills in teaching and instruction advanced with the help and support of her new-found Filipina mentor, she also grew as a Filipino American teacher, as exemplified by Carmen serving as the president for FAEA.

Anthony

Anthony, an elementary school teacher for 16 years, began his classroom teaching career at a Title I, urban public school in a Southern California community that has been depicted in movies and lyricized in music as being impacted by high rates of poverty and crime. Moreover, the city was the site of a six-day riot during the Civil Rights Movement in the summer of 1965, an incident that was sparked by the arrest of an African American motorist by a White law enforcement officer. The violent reaction by residents at the scene reflected longtime neglected issues in the neighborhood, including housing, employment, and schools (Civil Rights Digital Library, n.d.). Anthony identifies himself as a social justice educator, which he believes involves, "...community building, community organizing, investing in communities, creating change, [and] revolutionizing...old guard type systems. ...it has to do with action and it's also like decolonize...decolonizing our mindsets and decolonizing our habits." Strobel (2001) writes:

Colonial mentality is a state of marginal consciousness, which lacks the critical awareness of the forces of domination and oppression that shape attitudes, values, and behavior in the colonized. This lack of awareness among colonized peoples results in mimicry of the colonizers' attitudes, values, and behavior while their own indigenous values keep subverting and betraying this mimicry. Colonial mentality among Filipinos is the result of 300 years of Hispanic colonization and a century of American colonization. (p. ix)

Furthermore, according to Strobel, decolonization is “healing,” as “the colonized individual” undergoes “a process of learning to love one’s self again, of seeing one’s self as important enough to think and write about, of learning to face the truth and learning to tell the truth...colonization silences,” while decolonization enables one “to see the consequences of silencing” (p. 50).

Anthony shared: “I went into teaching...investing in the most underserved communities and the marginalized communities...and this is my activism.” His sense of activism is also reflected by his work outside of the classroom with his former students through the grassroots formation of the Watts Youth Collective (WYC). The WYC was created by his previous students, who went on to middle school and could not find a space in that setting whereby they could dialogue on such issues as racial and economic equity and notions of social justice, which Anthony thoughtfully incorporated into his classroom instruction.

Currently, Anthony teaches at Cedar Charter School²³, a campus that he collaboratively worked with others to envision, create, and recently open in an urban neighborhood in Northern California. It is at this campus that Anthony first experiences being with Filipino American students and families. Moreover, it is through these racially and culturally distinctive encounters that Anthony *sees himself* as a Filipino American teacher.

Maverick

Maverick began her professional career in the fields of business and information technology. In spite of the fact that she successfully worked in these areas for eight years,

²³ Pseudonym

she reached a point when she no longer desired to be there. Her project manager encouraged her to explore teaching. Maverick explains: “I was like, wow, that’s wild!” Yet, “[I was] the first one that want[ed] to go and do the [company] training...so excited when we create[d] a [technology] system...and want[ed] to do the [staff] presentation...training and...teaching...[I] just like[d] working with all these people,” says Maverick.

After volunteering in local public and private school classrooms, Maverick knew that teaching would be her new direction. “I loved it,” she recalls. After completing her teacher credential program, she was offered a position immediately after her first school site interview. She was hesitant, however, as she was asked to teach a second and third grade combination class. Upon expressing her reservations to the principal, Maverick was given the opportunity to attend a course regarding curriculum planning and instruction for combination-grade classes. Moreover, she soon found that her training as a computer programmer and her previous professional workplace experiences benefited her as a new elementary school teacher with regards to planning, organization, interacting with parents, and school site and district leadership.

Maverick not only began her classroom teaching career at Mason Elementary School,²⁴ but has remained at the campus for over nineteen years. She says that she chooses to stay at Mason because of the collegiality she feels among her fellow teachers and the administration, and the supportive parents within the community. In addition to her classroom teaching responsibilities, she has served in a number of leadership roles over the years, including as a member of the instructional leadership team and school site

²⁴ Pseudonym

council, and as the site representative for the school district's teachers' union. Mason Elementary is a Title I school and the student population is predominately Latino, representing 71% of the over 500 children. During the 2016-2017 school year, there were sixteen Filipino American students at the campus (California Department of Education, 2017). Moreover, Maverick is one of two Filipino American teachers at the site. She says that although students of Filipino descent are "rare" at Mason, "I get every year [in my class] at least one kid that's Filipino or half Filipino." In addition, each school year "...there [are] kids that [ask], Mrs. [Maverick], are you Filipino?" When Filipino American students learn that she is of Filipino descent too, Maverick thinks "...that it makes them feel more comfortable because then I'm a role model for them."

Gail

Gail shares that when growing up, her identity as a young person was wholly tied to formal schooling. She reflects: "I loved to go to school...do the homework...it was just a lovely system where I...exist[ed] in happiness." Yet, the notion of becoming a teacher emerged after she experienced failure in her initial college major. "I realized [that] I wasn't good at computer science, but I was good at learning. I was good at showing somebody else what I knew," she reflects. After being accepted into the education department of her college in her junior year, she never looked back.

She began her classroom teaching career in the elementary school setting, starting in an urban, magnet school environment that attracted children and families from outside of the neighborhood because of the campus' creative and performing arts programs. Then she was one of a group of teachers selected to open a new elementary school in an affluent community within the same school district. Her love for mathematics later drew

her to become a math specialist, solely teaching the subject within multiple elementary classrooms at an urban, Title I school site. Her extensive math training enabled her to then serve as a math resource teacher before she returned to teaching multiple subject areas within a single elementary school classroom.

Now in her twenty-fifth year of teaching, Gail's school site role is multifaceted, as she is a Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math (STEAM) resource teacher. Her position at the Ride Elementary School²⁵ is funded by a federal grant. Gail explains that she is "...more of a marketer, PR [public relations] person," inviting families and students to attend the magnet school. In addition, she supports staff members as needed and works with classroom teachers on curriculum development as they create units of study that integrate STEAM within such core academic areas as language arts. According to Gail, in spite of the fact that the campus is located in a community of White residents, the student population is predominately children of color, including Latino, Vietnamese, and African American students. She also shares that through her site's outreach efforts they hope to attract local White families, as Gail showcases what their neighborhood school can uniquely offer to their children.

Narciso

Narciso is a fifteen-year high school English teacher. "I don't think I had always wanted to be a teacher," he says. Narciso feels that his journey into teaching began when he worked as a writing tutor in college. He reflects: "I was learning...about my own process coming into language." His desire to pursue a teaching credential was based upon his experiences supporting student writers, the guidance he received as a tutor from a

²⁵ Pseudonym

mentor associated with the writing program, and from taking ethnic studies and literature classes, which Narciso says gave him “a context about the significance of education and curriculum.” In addition, he feels that his mother being a teacher in the Philippines motivated him as well.

Narciso thinks about teaching and curriculum beyond the required academic standards. He shares: “I’m teaching my Common Core...[yet] I’d like to think that I’m teaching my students in a way that’s for the immediacy of the time that they are with me and then also [for] the long-term.” For example, he explains that at the beginning of the school year he shows his eleventh-grade students a video that introduces the notion of “crossing the line” – making transitions. He asks his students to reflect upon who they are at that moment and who they want to be as they move forward into their junior year: “...what kinds of things do they need to cross the line towards? Why do they need to cross the line?” Student reflections include such topics as graduating from high school, family and their culture. Throughout the school year, “crossing the line” is re-visited, as the phrase serves as a thread to connect students’ learning. Furthermore, it can also signify a sense of movement, a continual stepping forward as a student’s year perpetually moves onward.

As perhaps to be expected, Narciso asks his students to engage with language within the classroom. For example, the Title I, majority students of color urban high school where he teaches is readily perceived as a “ghetto” school. He explains “...that type of languaging...gets...shared about perceptions of the school or...of the neighborhood, and then also students...echoing that at some point...seeing themselves as [ghetto] or seeing... [that] they’re tagged...as that.” When this “ghetto” view of the

campus arose in the classroom, Narciso facilitated a dialogue with his students about the word's meaning to them and the potential impact that being perceived as "ghetto" can have on them and their community. Moreover, being seen as a teacher from a "ghetto" campus affects Narciso as well. He shares:

...if I'm going to [do a] professional development district-wide...you introduce yourself and...what school you're from...even within adults, there's...“Oh, you're from Solis,”²⁶ and...there's [a] kind of...awkwardness...“Oh, you work at that school.” So [they] don't know how to navigate this moment with you because I work at those others schools.

Thus, as a Filipino American English teacher at a school associated with a particular perception, Narciso experiences and wrestles with the notion and constructs of language both within and outside of his classroom.

Rosalie

Rosalie is a middle school United States history teacher. She began her classroom teaching career fifteen years ago in a high school setting, whereby she found herself as the only woman, surrounded by male U.S. history teachers who were athletic coaches at the campus as well. She recalls one colleague saying, “I'm not a teacher, I'm a coach.”

Rosalie reflects upon her first two years:

I was the only female...[and] Asian...I always felt...I had to prove myself and have a voice. I had to make my voice stronger...I really felt...I had to do my homework...I never came in not prepared. I wanted to be prepared...have conversation...prepared with questions...prepared with something to offer because I felt like I needed to earn my place, especially with males.

In addition, she worked over 450 miles away from her hometown, where she desired to be. Rosalie explains that when initially interviewing for teaching positions in the

²⁶ Pseudonym

community where she grew up, she found that the school district was looking for social science teachers who were bilingual.

Two years later, she was able to return to her hometown and secure a position at a high school in the secondary school district where she graduated. The middle school where Rosalie currently teaches U.S. History has been her campus for eleven years. During the 2016-2017 school year, Eastside Middle School²⁷ enrolled over 1,700 students. Fifty-five percent of the student population is Latino, and the second largest racial group is Filipino children, numbering 21%.

Rosalie shares that when she first arrived at Eastside, many Filipino American students wondered about her racial background. “Are you Mexican?” they asked. When she responded that she was Filipino, they further questioned, “Are you full Filipino?...you don’t look like a lot of other Filipinos.” She responded: “...well, there’s so many of us. We’re all so different.” She further reflected: “They’re so innocent and it’s just based on...what they know and what they see and then...my last name...A lot of them thought I was Mexican.” Eventually, Rosalie “passed” the being Filipino “test.” She explains that “what you eat is the ultimate test. I’m all, ‘I eat it all. Yes, I like the *bagoong*. I eat it all.’ And they’re like, ‘oh ok, you are Filipino.’ ”

Bringing Forth

Together I gather
 We can achieve the impossible
 Our strength will never be feeble
 All our voices will be heard
 And our thoughts will be fed
 Through a single channel
 (Chidi, 2005)

²⁷ Pseudonym

The gathering of Filipino American teachers was set in the context of this first stanza of Chidi's (2005) poem *Together I Gather*. She reflects upon how a collective coming together can empower persons in thought and voice, enabling them to "channel" their being into a singular "strength" to "achieve" what may be "impossible." It was in the gathering together of Filipino American teachers that I prepared to engage in thoughtful questioning to open the conversations, and I continued to ground myself upon my guiding question: **What are the lived experiences of Filipino American preK-12 public school teachers in the United States?** By doing so, I sought to hear the voices of Filipino American teachers and to bring forward their lifeworlds, asking them to show who they are genuinely. Moving forward to Chapter Four, I reveal their unique lived experiences and render the structures of meaning in the lived experiences of Filipino American teachers.

**CHAPTER FOUR:
BREAKING THE SILENCE AS A FILIPINO AMERICAN TEACHER**

Be still
Listen to the stones of the wall.
Be silent, they try
To speak your

Name.
Listen
To the living walls.
Who are you?
Who
Are you? Whose
Silence are you?

Who (be quiet)
Are you (as these stones
Are quiet). Do not
Think of what you are
Still less of
What you may one day be.
Rather
Be what you are (but who?) be
The unthinkable one
You do not know.
(Merton, 1957)

When I served as a Special Education instructional assistant at an elementary school with a large Filipino American student population, a White male teacher at the site expressed that he greatly appreciated how *quiet* Filipino American students were in his classroom. His sense of thankfulness regarding an ongoing, verbally-silent existence of Filipino boys and girls caused me to reflect upon my own childhood. My parents taught me to respect my elders, including teachers, which meant *being quiet* – not speaking unless given permission and not causing any type of disruption in the classroom.

Merton's (1957) poem, *In Silence*, asks one to reflect upon "Who are you?"

in the quietness and stillness, as though we, like a stone wall, reflect individual pieces and layers that have been built-up over time. Whereby in aggregate, these parts collectively comprise who we are. Moreover, the poet calls upon us to “Be still” and “Listen,” for in the act of being silent, one can more authentically “Be what you are.” In addition, one can also discover the “You” that you have yet to know. Thus, in this case, silence is not a passive existence. Rather, it can be viewed as a prelude to a rising-up from within, an opportunity for your true self to be revealed and your genuine voice to speak.

Throughout my fourteen years of being a Filipino American teacher, no one inquired: What does it mean to be a Filipino American teacher? For me, serving as a teacher, who is of Filipino descent and American nationality, is *who I am*. In spite of the discouragement or sense of disappointment I received from certain members of my family regarding my profession, *Being me*, a Filipino American teacher, has brought me great joy, satisfaction, and the opportunity to contribute to my community and country in ways that I could have never imagined.

Yet, what has the journey been like for other Filipino American teachers? Has anyone ever asked? In my mind, such an inquiry is long overdue. This study strives to transcend what may be a culturally-based, traditional Filipino quietness, and represents a wholehearted effort to break through the silence. The eight Filipino American teachers introduced in Chapter Three chose to share their lifeworlds with me and are a source for breaking through the silence.

“I will try, like them
To be my own silence:
And this is difficult. The whole
World is secretly on fire. The stones

Burn, even the stones
 They burn me. How can a man be still or
 Listen to all things burning? How can he dare
 To sit with them when
 All their silence
 Is on fire?"
 (Merton, 1957)

As Merton (1957) writes in this stanza of *In Silence*, being silent and sitting in silence “is difficult” as “The whole world is secretly on fire.” That which is inside is “burning,” asking for someone to “be still...Listen...to All their silence.” It is through our conversations and in their reflective writing that “I [sat] with” these Filipino American teachers as they unveiled their lived experiences – which for seven of them, was for the first time. In revealing our personal and professional journeys, we laughed, we cried, and boldly, we unleashed the fire within, breaking the silence of what it means to be a Filipino American preK-12 teacher in U.S. public schools.

A Being Misunderstood

On the first day at his first school, Coletrane, a brand new teacher at Del Sol High School, was shockingly grabbed by the arms of two fellow teachers who immediately interrogated him as they brought him to the office: “What are you doing here?” they asked. “You are not supposed to be here,” Coletrane was sternly told. In spite of the fact that he was wearing a suit and tie, the faculty members posited that his youthful appearance apparently made him “way too young to be a teacher.”

Evidently, in the eyes of his colleagues, Coletrane did not “look” like a teacher. Yet, what does a teacher “look like?”

Outsider

You don't know anything about me.
 You don't even know my name...
 But yet you judge me.
 I don't like being on the outside looking in.
 (Potts, 2010)

A young-looking, Filipino American man in a suit on a high school campus apparently seemed to other teachers to not be one of them. As Potts (2010) poeticizes in *Outsider*, in that moment, Coletrane, an unknown and unnamed teacher, was corporeally judged as being an outsider. In spite of earning the university degree and credential required to be a preK-12 teacher, his physical being was deemed as not looking legitimate.

Upon arriving at the school office, however, Coletrane's identity as a teacher was confirmed. His "(un)welcome" into the teaching profession reflects a question a number of the Filipino American teachers were asked at different points during their career, namely because of their race and culture. Thus, part of the exploration within this phenomenological study included conversations surrounding the question: "What are you doing here?" – being a Filipino American teacher.

From the Outside

Of the eight co-researchers in my study, only two had been taught by a teacher of Filipino descent throughout their formal K-12 schooling. Coletrane, after thirty-one years as a Filipino American teacher writes, "...it makes me wonder if my overall pedagogic approach would have been any different if there were Filipino-American teachers as part of my journey through life." With the continuing limited number of Filipino American teachers serving in U.S. public school classrooms today, perhaps such a reality may explain why being a Filipino American teacher can mean what Maverick calls being

“misunderstood,” which could include being “mistaken for a culture.” What is it like to be mistakenly seen by students and parents as not being Filipino American, but as a teacher of another race, ethnicity, or culture?

Maverick explains that on the first day of a new school year, it is commonplace for her students’ families to assume that she is Mexican American and speaks Spanish because of her Spanish surname. According to Maverick, “They’ll [Latino parents] automatically...start speaking to me in Spanish...but the minute I open my mouth and say...[the] one sentence I know in Spanish...they...look at me like, wow, what’s *wrong* with you? I thought you were [Mexican].” What it is like to be perceived as “wrong,” being a Filipino American teacher? She further reflects: “...when I was growing up, I didn’t have any Filipino teachers...in all of elementary and secondary school, so in my mind, Filipinos did not become teachers.” Her encounters with certain parents seem to reflect a similar notion – Filipino Americans are not to be “rightly” found in U.S. public school classrooms.

In Coletrane’s lifeworld:

...a lot of kids were...asking me, hey, do you surf?...Are you Guamanian, Eskimo, Indian...Mexican?...when I finally said I’m Filipino. “Oh, you’re Filipino,” it was...the last thing on their mind...for a lot of the students who were seeing me for the first time, I think in their mind they’re going, what kind, where are you from? What are you?

Moreover, as a Filipino American teacher, Coletrane felt the need to “say things like I was American born. I went to an American school and I went to an American college...They never thought that I was from the United States of America.”

Why can't you just understand?
 Why do i have to say it out loud?
 Why must u hear the words with your ears?
 Listen to the screams and tears of my soul.
 Listen to my silence. Hear it. I beg you. Hear it
 Please just hear it
 (Ksm, 2015)

In Ksm's (2015) poem, *Misunderstood*, the poet expresses a plea to be understood. Moreover, the stanzas seem to speak to a sense of disappointment, frustration, and pain in having to verbalize who one is in order to be believed. Had Coletrane been a White male, would he have had to "say it out loud" that he is an American by birth? Moreover, would his students have needed to "hear the words with [their] ears," that their teacher was educated in U.S. schools and earned his university degree in America? The students' apparent misunderstanding reflects a reality that Asian Americans readily face in the U.S.: being seen as the "forever foreigner." Lowe (1996) writes: "A national memory haunts the conception of the Asian-American...the Asian is always seen as an immigrant, as the 'foreigner within' [America], even when born in the United States and the descendent of generations born here before" (pp. 5-6). In addition, "Asian Americans feel like we're a guest in someone else's house, that we can never really relax and put our feet up on the table" (Tuan, 1998, p. 4). Will Filipino American teachers perpetually be misunderstood as foreigners in U.S. public school classrooms? Living in this misunderstood place can take a heavy toll on the identity of the teachers.

For Rosalie, being misunderstood as a Filipino American teacher included an unexpected challenge from a high school student as to her presence at the campus. When the young man saw her, he remarked: "Filipinos don't become teachers. They're usually nurses." The young man's remark reflected the rather significant number of women of

Filipino descent serving as nurses in the United States (Migration Policy Institute, 2014).

In that encounter, it seemed as though Rosalie had to justify herself to him. He asked, “Do you like what you do?” to which she responded: “I wouldn’t be here if I didn’t.”

Even outside of the school space, Rosalie has found that she has been viewed with a sense of misunderstanding, and at times disbelief, as to her being a teacher of Filipino descent who teaches American history. For example, when out to dinner with friends, a man at the restaurant was rather shocked to learn that Rosalie teaches United States history. According to Rosalie, “...he’s like, really?” When her friend asked him why he was surprised, he responded, “...she doesn’t look like a history teacher...[what] are they supposed to look like?” Rosalie’s friend asked. To which the man replied, “...usually they’re White and they’re male.”

Such perceptions of Rosalie being out of place as a Filipino American teacher have caused her to feel as though she has to prove her professional competence and her place in a secondary level history department. Trigg (2012) writes:

At any given moment, we are located within a place, be it in the hallways of universities, the cockpits of airplanes, or lost in the forest at night. Over time, those places define and structure our sense of self, such that being dis-placed can have a dramatic consequence on the experience of who we are. (p. 1)

Rosalie reflects: “...my first couple of years of teaching [were in]...the old boy’s club...[a] coach [is] usually in the history department. And so [I] stand out as a sore thumb being a woman and being Filipina.” Even at her current site, where she has taught for over a decade, she wonders about what her students’ parents think when they see her at the school’s open house. “Do your parents know...that a Filipino is teaching this [U.S. history] stuff?” Moreover, “...at the beginning of the year, I have a sense of displacement,” Rosalie expresses. “And I feel like it’s the first semesters, the first couple

of months where I'm really trying to sell myself, sell that I am credible, that I am an expert in my content.”

Casey (2009) writes:

Body and landscape present themselves as coeval epicenters around which particular places pivot and radiate. They are, at the very least, the bounds of places. In my embodied being I am *just at* a place at its inner boundary; a surrounding landscape, on the other hand, is *just beyond* that place as its outer boundary. Between the two boundaries – and very much as a function of their differential interplay – implacement occurs. Place is what takes place between body and landscape. (p. 29)

In spite of the fact that Rosalie has been *in place* at her middle school and has embodied her role as a U.S. history teacher at this site for more than ten years, her sense of implacement is challenged when the landscape changes. In this case, the altered landscape is the arrival of a new class of students and their families in the classroom, along with their possible wonderings about their Filipino American history teacher. Furthermore, Rosalie's sense of displacement is impacted by cultural dimensions, as her race and ethnicity have led others to question her existence as a teacher of U.S. history. She writes, that being of Filipino descent, “My [physical] appearance does not exactly convey American patriotism.” According to Casey:

Places are also primary in the order of culture. Just as there can be no disembodied experience of landscape, so there can be no unimplaced cultures. If “things that exist are somewhere,” among these existing things are human cultures; they too are in place. (p. 31)

Rosalie has evidently broken the mold of who is often culturally perceived to be a U.S. history teacher: a White male. She is proud of how far she has come in spite of the racial and gender challenges. Rosalie reflects: “Am I second-guessed all the time? Absolutely.” For example, “...there [are] times where you're...put on the spot. ‘So when did this happen?’ ...and I would answer.” The person would then question: “ ‘Are you sure? Let

me look that up on my phone.’ Really?’” thought Rosalie. “I just told you...then they do [verify via their phone] and then they’re like...‘You’re right.’ Yes I’m right.” In spite of such moments of being doubted, Rosalie says, “...I do feel empowered. I’m so proud...[being] 15 years in the profession.” Moreover, she writes:

My hope is that students see a Filipina American teacher teaching U.S. history and she has it all figured out. She loves what she does with a smile, happy to be spending a couple of hours with me. She is excited to share her knowledge. Who knew a Filipina American that looks like me can be well versed in the founding of our country and the Constitution?

Rosalie, as a Filipino American teacher, has evidently challenged the notion of being misunderstood as a “forever foreigner.”

Van Manen (1997) writes that one aspect of *lived time* is that of the temporality of our existence in the world. Rosalie’s feelings of displacement each new school year are not only a dimension of the horizon (Gadamer, 1960/2004) of her past, but they also stay with her as memories that impact her present and future horizons as well. For those experiences of being questioned and feeling out of place, “leave their traces on [her] being” (van Manen, 1997, p. 104). Thus, being a Filipino American teacher can mean wrestling with temporal, yet potentially reoccurring moments of self-doubt as to the “rightness” of one’s place in the classroom because of your race, ethnicity, and culture.

On the Inside

The sense of misunderstanding regarding a Filipino American’s choice to be a teacher, can also reside within her family. A Filipina mother may ask: *Why are you choosing to be a teacher?* According to Carmen, Filipino parents expect their children to pursue professions that are perceived as being of high-status, such as that of a medical doctor, nurse, or engineer. Anthony shares that for certain members of his family, being a

teacher was seen as “not the honorable...not the prestigious...not...bring[ing] fame to the [family] name.” Moreover, he reflects: “...there was only one Filipina teacher in my elementary school, [who] I never had. And so, I mean, I’m not even supposed to be a teacher, right?”

Such a lack of understanding within a Filipino American family towards a son or daughter who becomes a teacher can be held long-term. Gail writes:

...I know that [my mom] really doesn’t know what I do as a teacher...her wanting me to be a principal because they make more money than a teacher is based on her valuing financial wealth over personal satisfaction and passion. It’s hurtful that my happiness isn’t what she values more. It isn’t good enough for me to say, “I like what I do. I’m good at what I do. I don’t want to be a principal.”

Moreover, Gail writes that “...the Filipino way [is]: obeying your parents.” Thus, for a Filipino daughter not to follow what her mother believes is best, including the former’s career, the daughter can be culturally viewed by what Enriquez (1997) characterizes as being *Ibang Tao*, an *outsider*. Being a teacher can therefore mean choosing to not conform to cultural and elder, first-generation expectations, and thus not adhering to the traditional Filipino values of *Pakikibungay* and *Pakikitungo*, respectively. As a result, a daughter or son choosing to become a teacher may be misunderstood within her/his family because s/he is existing outside of traditional cultural lines.

What is it like to live knowing that your parents feel a sense of disappointment with you being a teacher? After Carmen earned her master’s degree in education, she was hurt by her mother’s words:

She [her mother] said, “Now that you [have] your master’s of education out of the way, why don’t you go...to law school?”...I...looked at her and [said], “You can’t be serious.”...it [her words] made me feel bad...yet she’s...still pushing me...and I guess in a way she didn’t value my master’s education. It wasn’t good enough.

Rosalie writes, “I feel that I have to prove myself to my family and friends. Do they see honor in the teaching profession?” The modern French origin of the word honor, or *honneur*, is that of “victory,” or “triumph” (Online Etymology Dictionary). In spite of how she may be misunderstood by some of her loved ones, Rosalie writes with a sense of feeling victorious and triumphant in her choice to be a teacher: “At many gatherings I don’t complain about my job; rather, I have great stories to share about my students...most [of my friends and family] won’t experience the energy, excitement, and creativity that sparks in the classroom.” Thus, Rosalie’s sense of honor, being a Filipino American teacher, reflects the traditional Filipino value of *dangal*, the “...*honor from within* – [the] knowledge of one’s true worth, character, achievement and success” (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000, p. 57). According to Rosalie, “It’s [teaching is] what I do. *I don’t know any other way to be.*”

The door is now open
 But are you ready to step out?
 To take on life on your own
 Define yourself
 Realize your presence, Exist!!

You've been following their rules
 Climbing the ladder one step at a time
 The society's way, you know
 You're born
 You'll die
 In between you earn
 Money, fame and the need to succeed

Wow, I wish I was like you
 I wish I could follow rules
 Live to your expectation
 Be 'Successful'

But I choose to step out the door
 Embrace the sun, breathe in the air
 End this pretentious living you call life
 and exist instead of survive
 Unlike you and your society
 Just myself: a disappointment.
 (Sprishya, 2013)

In his poem *Disappointment*, Sprishya (2013) asks if one is “ready to step out,” to truly embrace “your presence” and to “exist” in this world as you genuinely are. Moreover, the poet urges us to be that supposed “disappointment” in the eyes of others, for by doing so, one is boldly stepping out of another’s expectations in order to be more fully you. Thus, being a Filipino American teacher can mean living with the understanding that one has culturally disappointed her family, yet in the process, has come to a place of a fuller existence. Bachelard (1958/1994) writes:

Sight says too many things at one time. Being does not see itself. Perhaps it listens to itself. It does not stand out, it is not *bordered* by nothingness: one is never sure of finding it, or of finding it solid when one approaches a center of being. And if we want to determine man’s [sic] being, we are never sure of being closer to ourselves if we “withdraw” into ourselves, if we move toward the center of the spiral; for often it is in the heart of being that being is errancy. Sometimes, it is in being outside itself that being tests consistencies. Sometimes, too, it is closed in, as it were, on the outside. (p. 215)

Bachelard calls us to consider how being cast outside, such as out of one’s traditional culture, can allow a person to test her sense of Being more fully, and to listen and find who she really is.

Such has proven true for Gail, for in spite of how she may be a cultural outsider as a Filipino American teacher, and misunderstood by her mother, Gail reflects that when she “found” teaching she felt like she was “at home.” She writes that being “at home” in this profession means that you, “...finally *know* to your core, this is what I’m [supposed]

to do, this is what I *want* to do, this is what *I'm good at*, a true sense of peace and calm take over.”

Moreover, for Anthony, over time, his family learned that he being a teacher was “not a phase.” He emphasized, “...this is what I’m gonna do for the long haul...*teaching is something I live*.” As for Carmen, she has found a sense of peace with her mother’s misunderstanding. She (Carmen) writes, “To this day, I still feel...I will never make her proud...But in the end, I’ve learned how to not let my mom’s opinions of my job affect me as much. Since getting my master’s degree in education, I’ve...depended less on what my mom thought of me and just relied on my own inner sense of worth.” Thus, Carmen has found that by dwelling within this “inner space...everything is commensurate with [her] inner being” (Bachelard, 1958/1994, p. 229). Furthermore, as Sprishya (2013) writes, Anthony, Carmen and Gail have “[stepped] out of the door, [embraced] the sun” and “[breathed] the air” of being a Filipino American teacher. They are evidently living out their *dangal*, honoring from within, the Filipino American teachers they chose to be.

Being misunderstood as a Filipino American teacher can therefore be an external existence, whereby one’s bodily presence in a classroom and at a school site can come into question. Moreover, it can be a lifeworld impacted by internal misunderstanding, as the Filipino American teacher within may have to learn to live with longtime expressions of disappointment by family and friends regarding her choice to teach. In the latter case, the words spoken by loved ones may be painful to hear. Yet, what about the language(s) that are lost? For a Filipino American teacher, being misunderstood can also mean the absence of not only a Philippine native tongue, but additionally, the words, in English, that remain unspoken as well. Such is a silence that may reflect a cultural way of being.

Loss of Words

Maverick excitedly waited at the Filipino Cultural Resource Center for a panel of guest speakers to begin their talk. She was soon quite bothered, however, when she heard a rather judgmental comment made by one of the panelists. According to Maverick, the person, "...noticed that the [young people] there were kind of like me. We were second generation [Filipino American] and we didn't have an accent or speak...in Tagalog or any other Filipino languages. And she made a comment to one of the [other] women there. 'Oh, it would have been better if they [knew] their language,' " said the elder, first-generation Filipina woman. In response, Maverick, "...looked at her and...said":

"I may not be able to speak Tagalog or other Filipino [languages] like you, but I understood every single thing that you said and I don't appreciate how you were talking negatively about us. We're second generation so...my parents wanted us to succeed in school and there wasn't anything available like ELL [English Language Learners]...language assistance program." So my parents said, "No, you will learn English and we will speak Tagalog to you and you will understand it, but you will not speak it until we feel confident that you can succeed in the English...education system."

Maverick's cultural encounter reflects how being misunderstood as a Filipino American teacher can also mean others questioning you linguistically. Why do you *not speak* a native language of the Philippines? Thus, Filipino American teachers may often find themselves having to explain and justify to elder, first-generation Filipinos and non-Filipinos the loss of their native language(s) within one generation of their family's immigration to the United States.

Moreover, Filipino American teachers may readily encounter a sense of *expectation* that they speak their parents' native tongue. For example, during Maverick's student teaching placement, she describes how her master teacher, a White woman in her "50s or 60s," assumed that Maverick "could speak Tagalog, and [she] was like, 'Oh...I

know nothing.’ ” What is it like when a Filipino American teacher encounters such language expectations? The Latin origin of the word *expectation*, or *expectationem*, means ‘anticipating, an awaiting’ (Online Etymology Dictionary). Rosalie found herself seemingly not living up to the cultural expectations of a group of Filipino high school students as they apparently waited with anticipation for this Filipino American teacher to be like them linguistically. She shares:

...Filipino students...approached me to be the advisor of their club...I was the only Filipino teacher on campus...PUSO, that’s the name of [their] club. “Does it stand for anything?” [Rosalie asked.] And they [the students] looked at me. “It means heart” [they responded.] I did not know, and they were like, “Oh, you don’t speak [Tagalog]?” And I said, “No...I didn’t grow up Tagalog...I grew up Ilocano.”...all those expectations.

Although that moment with the students “became comical” as they told Rosalie, “...we’ll teach you [Tagalog].” Yet, she felt a sense of loss as “...they [Filipino students] have all these ideas that you’re this way, you know this. You’re going to...[and] it’s not the case,” Rosalie reflects. Thus, being a Filipino American teacher can mean encountering the cultural expectations of others, Filipino and non-Filipino, and experiencing another’s disappointment when you are not whom they anticipate you to be culturally.

From Being Quiet to Being Silent

Even if English is one’s first and primary language as a Filipino American teacher, what if a cultural quietness prevails? During a conversation with Carmen, she shares with me that within traditional Filipino households “We were instilled with traditional values, like you respect your elders. You are quiet when the teacher is teaching or talking. You are polite, you say please, you say thank you and just [have] an overall respect for authority.” Long (2014) writes that “quietness” is “familiar” and “homey” (p. 95). Thus, when reflecting upon lived experiences of Filipino Americans, *being quiet*

often begins at home. Readily, quietness is a cultural expectation for younger Filipinos in relation to their elders, or regardless of age, when one is in the presence of a perceived figure of authority. What is it like when this cultural value of *quietness* is carried into adulthood for Filipino American teachers? What does it mean to live as a quiet teacher? Who does quietness benefit?

During the 2015-2016 school year, Carmen's campus was comprised of six Filipino teachers. The largest racial group was White, numbering 26, representing nearly 58% of the middle school's teachers (California Department of Education, Ed-Data, 2017). Carmen expresses feelings of connectedness at her school site among the faculty and staff of Filipino descent. "You're like in a family," she says. According to Shapiro (n.d.), "Filipinos value relationships among their peer groups or *barkada*" (p. 2). In addition to the camaraderie felt, Carmen also discussed that an attribute she observed among her Filipino American colleagues over her twenty years at the site: "Whenever something concerns them at our school, they can be very vocal to me and other [Filipino] teachers, but when it comes down to expressing their concerns to the administration, they're quite quiet about it." Moreover, according to Carmen, her "Filipino American colleagues...have really good ideas and suggestions...sometimes I ask them well why don't you say something and they [say] nah, they're [the administration] not going to do anything." According to Carmen, this lack of speaking up reflects additional traditional Filipino values:

The Filipino culture is you don't complain. You just suck it up, you know, and so a lot of times, us Filipino teachers, we're like the busy bee workers. We do the work, the legwork. We don't complain. If something's wrong, we try to fix it.

It is poignant to hear that *not being quiet*, when experiencing an issue or situation in the workplace, is viewed as “complaining” by a Filipino American teacher, versus actively problem-solving. In contrast, Carmen observes that the African American and White teachers at her campus express their concerns in staff meetings. She reflects that “They’re not hesitant to vocalize what they want or what they feel is wrong,” enabling them “to bring about change that they want to see.”

The late 14th Century Old French origin of quietness means “peaceable, at rest, tranquil” (Online Etymology Dictionary). On the other hand, Long (2014) writes that differing from quietness, “Silence is more forbidding, perhaps a bit fearsome” (p. 95). In addition, “To be silent means to refrain from speech. To be silenced is to be repressed, suppressed, censored, shut up.” Thus, in apparent cultural acts of self-censorship and verbal-suppression, being a Filipino American teacher can mean moving beyond quietness to *being silent*. According to Strobel (2001) such silence reflects vestiges of Philippine colonization and Filipino colonial mentality, as discussed in Chapter Three.

In his poem *Silence Is...*, Carruthers (2014) writes:

Silence is an expression
 One that cannot be heard
 Silence cannot be spoken
 Although it is a word
 Silence is a presence
 Of great nothingness
 Silence can be something
 And yet cease to exist

For Filipino American teachers who are silent, how can they emerge from silence’s unheard expression and “presence of great nothingness” and “be [that] something” of a voice-full existence? What is perhaps lost by what is left unspoken? In Carmen’s lived experiences, the silence of her fellow Filipino American colleagues when among non-

Filipino teachers and administrators, reflected the loss of “really good ideas and suggestions” that could have addressed certain issues at her middle school. What is it like to live in silence as a Filipino American teacher? Moreover, does anyone around you even notice?

A Loss of Leadership

Rosalie wrestles with serving in a leadership role at her school site. During a conversation, she shares with me an experience she had at a Faculty Advisory Committee (FAC) meeting, which included the site principal. At the meeting, Rosalie challenged a colleague’s view as her co-worker aired frustration when describing a “D” grade student who regularly did not come to class prepared (e.g. without a pencil). In response, Rosalie expresses:

Well give them credit for being engaged, but if they didn’t put it on paper, don’t hold out. [You’ve] got to wait. And she [Rosalie’s colleague] rolled her eyes at me like that’s not good enough, and the conversation moved [on].

A few weeks later when the FAC reconvened, the same student issue was discussed. This time, the school principal verbalized Rosalie’s previous response. According to Rosalie:

I’m sitting next to [the principal] this time. She [the principal] used the same analogy I did. The principal said if the student brings their pencil, they bring their paper and they showed up that day, well that’s progress. And who’s shaking their head, yeah, you’re right? That same teacher. So I definitely felt like...why were my words, why was that not good enough? I just said that and now the principal says that and now it’s worth gold. So I’m struggling with that...So I was like is it me? Is it because I’m Filipino and Filipinos don’t say much?

This was not a moment of quietness for Rosalie; it was, rather, a silencing one. There was no sense of peace or tranquility for her in that leadership space. Being the only Filipino American on the FAC, Rosalie wondered if her racial and cultural background could limit her participation and effectiveness as a potential teacher-leader on her campus. At her

middle school, during the 2014-2015 school year the teaching staff was comprised of four teachers of Filipino descent, among a faculty that was 49% White (California Department of Education, Ed-Data, 2017). “I think that’s something [significant] as a Filipino teacher working with other [non-Filipino] educators, [to] hav[e] your voice heard,” Rosalie says.

Moreover, according to Rosalie: “I think sometimes that’s what’s hard is being the Filipino that’s the yes person all the time. And then is the yes person the fool because they say yes all the time, because they’re too scared to say no?” Such a perspective further reflects what Anthony describes as a strongly-emphasized, traditional cultural value by his parents: “Always [take the] path of least resistance,” meaning do not “speak out” and avoid “causing trouble.” Rosalie seems to struggle with the notion of being a Filipino American teacher-leader. For beyond merely being vocal, she desires to be *authentic*, having the courage and confidence *to be* her *Self*, and to express what she truly feels, even if it may “cause waves” and challenge the status quo of the school “elders” (e.g. principal, senior teachers).

Heidegger (1927/1962) writes that one’s existence, or *Da-Sein*, has the potential to be authentic. Yet, in the “*potentiality-for Being-one’s Self*,” the “ ‘who’ ” of *Da-Sein* is the “ ‘Self’ ” (p. 312). However, when the “who” becomes lost “in the ‘they,’ ” inauthenticity results. In such a collective sense of lostness, the “possibilities of Being” become that “which is closest to it (the tasks, rules, and standards, the urgency and extent, of concerned and solicitous Being-in-the-world).” Moreover, the choosing of possibilities is removed from *Da-Sein* as well. If reversed, whereby *Da-Sein* “...brings itself back...from the ‘they’, the they-self is modified in an existenti[al] manner so that it becomes authentic Being-one’s-Self” (p. 313). In the midst of FAC, how does Rosalie

claim her existence as a Filipino American teacher? How does she find and be her authentic Self amid the lostness of “they?”

In light of Rosalie’s apprehension to serve as a teacher-leader at her school site, her colleagues and the administration are less likely to benefit fully from the leadership abilities and skills she displayed for a school district-wide event. Previously, Rosalie successfully served as the co-chair for the district’s Magkaisa Conference, a large-scale gathering of Filipino American students and their families. Students of Filipino descent represent the second largest ethnic population in the district. In 2015-2016, there were 3,392 Filipino students, representing 8% of the school district’s student ethnic composition (California Department of Education, Ed-Data, 2017). The conference included workshops on K-12 and higher education, exploring potential careers, and health and wellness within the context of celebrating the Filipino culture. As the conference co-chair, Rosalie oversaw the event planning committee as they organized student, parent, community and district outreach, and the planning and implementation of student and parent workshops, venue logistics, food, and entertainment. Rosalie smiles as she reflects upon her participation and leadership in the conference: “It felt good because you felt like oh wow, people noticed, especially the veteran [Filipino American] teachers who’ve been around for a long time...and the administrators...*they notice you.*” In that moment, Rosalie genuinely valued *being seen* and recognized as a Filipino American teacher-leader. Moreover, in a written piece she reflects:

In that moment, I felt my role was purposeful. I felt much more purposeful than I do in the classroom. At the conference, the environment is engaging and rich with Filipino Educators. It felt good to be surrounded by people that have chosen a path much like my own. The environment is rare and unique as the conference leaders and participants were all Filipino and united under the umbrella of

education. Opportunities like this do not come often. I felt proud of my heritage and beamed with pride to [co-chair] the conference.

When looking back at her conference and leadership experiences, Rosalie seemed to dwell in a tranquil quietness. Long (2014) writes: “Somehow a deep quietness is related to living a meaningful life...quietness opens the door to a richer interior life” (p. 96). Rosalie genuinely found educational meaning and cultural richness when given the opportunity to be fully a Filipino American teacher-leader. Yet, in the context of Rosalie’s potential school site leadership, for her, a sense of silence has been more pervasive than a quiet ease. She further reflects: “So...that’s what my leadership, that’s where I kind of stand, like I don’t know where to be.”

Rosalie speaks about finding herself dwelling in-between two leadership worlds, unsure of whether or not *to be* a Filipino American teacher-leader at her school site. Aoki (2005) writes about a similar struggle, regarding the notion of a teacher “[i]ndwelling [b]etween [t]wo [w]orlds” (p. 159). According to Aoki, “...our teacher, Miss O, walks into her classroom...by her mere presence in the classroom as teacher, she initiates a transformation of the sociocultural and physical environment into something different.” Moreover, as within Rosalie’s context of the FAC, “The environment ceases to be environment, and in its place comes into being a pedagogic situation, a lived situation pregnantly alive in the presence of people.” Yet, how does a Filipino American teacher live in such tensionality, whereby she may feel as though her cultural self exists within the margins of school site leadership? Although she is bodily present, the absence of her authentic self and voice may hinder her potential to facilitate and be a part of transforming the school community physically and socio-culturally for the better.

As Filipino American teachers, Carmen and Rosalie experienced silence with regards to voicing their ideas and concerns genuinely when among their campus colleagues and administration. Undergirding such moments are traditional Filipino values, namely that of not speaking-up, which could be culturally perceived as disrespectfully challenging authority, causing problems, or complaining. The apparent loss of Carmen and Rosalie's perspectives as longtime teachers, went seemingly unknown at their school sites.

Concealing Oneself

Silencing one's professional suggestions or opinions may represent one level of individual suppression, yet what does it mean to not speak of or deny the *Being* you are? For Narciso, the silence of a Filipino American teacher reflects what he calls "tricky" – the "claiming [of] your Filipinoness...in a public...classroom setting." According to Narciso:

There's some negotiation that kind of has to happen...to make that [claim] important and public and speak from that voice...to check in to the condition and assess...it's a choice to do that...to make it [one's Filipinoness] public.

The Old French, year 1300 origin of *claim* stems from *clamer*, meaning "to call, name" (Online Etymology Dictionary). Extending further, Heidegger (1954/1993) writes, "To call means to appeal, and so to let something arrive and come to presence" (p. 388). Moreover, "What is called appears as what is present, and in its presence it is secured" (p. 390). Thus, for Narciso to claim his Filipinoness within the setting of the high school, he is announcing his arrival and presence as a Filipino American teacher. Yet, is there a risk in calling out or naming one's racial, ethnic, and cultural identity as a Filipino American

teacher within a public school setting? Conversely, what is the potential impact of silence on one's presence as a Filipino American teacher?

During the 2015-2016 school year, of the nearly 1,800 students at Solis High School²⁸, Filipinos represented the largest ethnic population – 36%. In contrast, from 2014-2015 there were 8 Filipino American teachers at the site, reflecting 9% of the school's faculty (California Department of Education, Ed-Data, 2017). Within this campus context, Narciso feels that it is “tricky” to claim outwardly or speak to *being* a Filipino American teacher. He explains that his hesitation to express his Filipinoness is because, “When we typically talk about schools...when we talk about students of color...we're going to talk about Latino and African American students, rightly so.” Narciso's thoughts reflect a recognition of the nationally reported academic achievement gap and struggles of African American and Latino students in United States K-12 public schools (e.g. lower rates of high school graduation) in comparison to their peers in other racial and ethnic groups (Howard, 2010; Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2017; Potter & Morris, 2017).

In addition to expressing an understanding of the formal schooling challenges that African American and Latino students may experience, Narciso also shares that within the context of his campus there are Filipino American students who are not doing well academically, too. The experiences of struggling Filipino students are overshadowed, according to Narciso, by the “default Model Minority Myth”: the notion that as Asian Americans, *all* Filipino students work hard and scholastically succeed. He said, “If you take the students as a whole, then you know the Filipino American students, not

²⁸ Pseudonym

necessarily all of them, but you know the Filipino American students, they're 'scoring higher' on the tests and so forth." Yet at the same time, Narciso states:

Even if there's [Filipino] students that are struggling as EL [English Language] learners. Even if we look at the data, yes a portion of the Filipino students are the ones that are tracked into the AP and the advanced and honors, and then there's the other [Filipino] students, the ones that are in my regular classes that have fallen through the cracks.

Thus, *being* a Filipino American teacher can mean *seeing* the fuller scope of the schooling experiences of Filipino American students. Thereby, a Filipino American teacher may potentially help to move a campus community and the families of Filipino American students beyond quite a prevalent, racially-based achievement myth.

Claim the fire in your life
Call out your freedom
Capture your light

Claim the fire of new being
Call out your vision
Capture new sight

Claim the fire of your breathing
Call out your voice
Capture believing

Claim the fire of creating
Call out imagination
Capture the meaning
(The Terry Tree, 2015)

The poet, The Terry Tree (2015), calls one to lay claim to that which truly reflects our inner self, the "fire" within, for by doing there is a sense of "freedom...vision...voice...meaning." By un-silencing his claim of Filipinoness, a Filipino American teacher might shift others toward new insights, enabling them possibly to embrace new perspectives, and a truer and larger reality – an understanding that not all Filipino American students are academically succeeding.

In 1864, the meaning of *claim* expanded to that of maintaining “as true” (Online Etymology Dictionary). Furthermore, Heidegger (1954/1993) writes, “...‘to call’ means to set in motion, to get something under way” (p. 386). *Being* a Filipino American teacher, Narciso desires to claim and speak the truth openly of the Filipino American student experience in all of its multiple aspects. In addition, by doing so, he desires to facilitate a movement among his fellow Filipino American teachers to act, calling upon them to address the unique needs of the Filipino American students in their midst. Moreover, for Narciso, “to claim...being Filipino American teacher[s] or Filipino American students [means] that we’re wanting a seat in this conversation around equity...around educational justice and placing ourselves in there.” Howard (2010) writes:

The ability to engage in honest, thoughtful, respectful dialogues about race, racial perceptions, and racism is sorely needed in school settings and research spaces. The inability of school leaders, practitioners, and researchers to talk about race and what it means in the work that is done on behalf of students undoubtedly has influenced the way that students experience schools...An explicit focus on race does not advocate a fixation on race, but rather a more inclusive, honest, and critical dialogue on how it shapes educational opportunities and outcomes. (p. 108)

Narciso expresses that he does not want to “get lost back into just...defining the educational achievement gap as black and brown, in terms of Latino and Black.” Yet in the process, he says that he is “not trying to take away from that [reality]” for African American and Latino students, particularly in light of the fact that at Solis High School during the 2015-2016 school year, Latino and African American students were 33% and 16% of the population (California Department of Education, Ed-Data, 2017), respectively.

Thus, in wrestling with whether or not to claim publicly his Filipinoness, Narciso is engaging in much deep thinking. Heidegger (1954/1993) writes, "...if the question 'What calls for thinking?' is asking what it is that first of all directs us to think, then we are asking for something that concerns ourselves because it calls upon us, upon our essence" (p. 385). Narciso, in his essence as a Filipino American teacher, is being directed towards and pointing to an issue that concerns him: the Filipino American students at his high school who are struggling. In his calling, he yearns to provide a way to support these young people. According to Narciso, what is evidently lacking is a collective voice of the Filipino American teachers at his site. Heidegger further writes, "...pointing then at something that has not, not yet, been transposed into the language we speak. It remains uncomprehended. We are an uninterpreted sign" (p. 382). If speaking out loud and claiming one's Filipinoness enables a Filipino American teacher to bring forth his thinking regarding the breath of issues that Filipino American students face in U.S. public schools, how does the presence of a Filipino American teacher fully emerge from the suppression of silence to do so?

Breaking the Silence

We were told
that silence was better
golden like our skin,
useful like
go quietly,
easier like
don't make waves
(Mirikitani, 1995)

Mirikitani (1995), a Japanese American poet, writes that forty years passed before her mother spoke about her internment during World War II under President Franklin Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066. In her piece, *BREAKING SILENCE*, Mirikitani brings

to the forefront a traditional Asian cultural value of maintaining silence – that throughout life one should “go quietly” and not “make waves.” Should an Asian American come to a place and time when *being silent* is no longer a “better...useful...easier” existence, how is it broken? What does it mean to break one’s silence as a Filipino American teacher?

As Rosalie wrestles with expressing herself as a potential Filipino American teacher-leader at her school site, she seems to have found both a sense of purpose and solace in her nurturing of current and future Filipina American voices. She beams:

I have some very vocal Filipinas [female students of Filipino descent]...in my accelerated class...and they are very good. They are very strong and I...constantly...feel I want to constantly come back to them and say, “Yeah, that is an excellent point. I love how you brought that to the forefront.” And you know, the feedback is huge.

Through her encouragement and instructional efforts as a Filipino American classroom teacher, Rosalie aims to facilitate and affirm the voices of Filipino American students. In contrast to the White male elementary school teacher who told me how much he appreciated the quietness of Filipino American children, Rosalie evidently seeks to change that paradigm of silence before it can potentially be solidified in adulthood. Even if Rosalie may feel that such a verbal cultural shift is too late for her, she views the ability of Filipino American students, especially girls, to express their thoughts and perspectives as an important aspect of their personal growth and development. Thus, for a Filipino American teacher, *breaking the silence* can mean cultivating and validating the voices of the next generation of Filipino Americans within this western cultural context – reflecting a departure from how a Filipino American child may be reared in a traditional Filipino home.

Yearning to Speak

In Narciso's case, he has reached out to bring together the handful of Filipino American teachers at his campus in order to dialogue about and potentially collaborate with one another to address Filipino American staff and student concerns and issues. He explains:

I remember...maybe four or five years ago....I kind of went around and I was like hey like let's all meet together and just like check in...we kind of got through just like a meeting or two...there was like something going [on] with the Philippines and raising money and things like that so that was like a collective sort of effort, but then sustaining that, I feel like that's the tricky part.

Narciso adds, "I see the need and I see also the potential" of facilitating ongoing conversations with Filipino American colleagues. In reference to his concerns regarding certain Filipino American students, who he sees are academically and socially struggling at the site, Narciso believes that directly addressing these issues will "take some leadership...some research and those other forms of knowledge...to be able to really bring that out you know. So that we [as Filipino American teachers] can see it, we can hear it, we can align to it, [and] we can maybe energize that vision."

Moreover, he struggles with the reality that he and his Filipino American colleagues are already taking on instructional, classroom, and school site responsibilities. Thus, asking a Filipino American teacher to address the particular needs of Filipino American students beyond a teacher's designated contractual roles may not be plausible.

Narciso expresses a sense of yearning:

I just want to ask them to come together and talk you know about the students that are here that reflect our backgrounds...and it's...leadership...actually because it's what you're going to do at your site amongst your colleagues to name and bring some energy and body you know to what this Filipino American thing is you know beyond just the numbers and the Tagalog [a Filipino language] or the *pancit* or *lumpia* [traditional Filipino food].

Therefore, breaking the silence as a Filipino American teacher can also mean taking on a leadership role by gathering together one's Filipino American colleagues to dialogue on what it truly means to be a Filipino American teacher within a school site context of a large population of Filipino American students, where Filipino youth may be struggling unseen. Although the once emerging conversations may have gone mostly silent at Narciso's high school, his initial efforts reflect a laudable, breakthrough moment.

Learning to Speak

Carmen broke her silence two years ago, eighteen years after she began teaching at her campus, when she served on the School Site Council (SSC). As a SSC member and in her role as recording secretary, she formally learned about the school's operations, and in particular, the budget process. The information she acquired gave her a new-found confidence to advocate for her professional growth as a middle school U.S. history teacher. Carmen reflects:

Why didn't I find out about this...much sooner? The fact that I [now] know a little bit more of how a school operates, then I can see...what are the things that I cannot ask? Sitting on the SSC...I see other teachers request funds and be approved for conferences that cost them over \$1,000. Just seeing other teachers be assertive...I [then] was assertive enough to ask for funds to go to a national social studies conference, whereas before when I was younger, I wouldn't be. I wouldn't dare ask because you just don't ask. *That's like a Filipino thing.* You know...if you don't get it, it's because...you can't.

Moreover, Carmen states, "I think that many of my Filipino American colleagues...have that mentality...you...don't complain about getting something or don't be assertive about asking for something because you're not going to get it." She feels that this cultural perspective could be attributed to the immigrant background of Filipino families and the poverty they may have experienced in the Philippines.

Carmen, as a Filipino American teacher, found her role in the SSC to be a transformative experience. She says: “Now...I’m becoming...a little bit more vocal...and asserting what I want and what I need. [If] I want to go to a conference, then I’m going to feel free to do that. I’m not going to say to myself...the school doesn’t have enough money.” Prior to her involvement in SSC, Carmen had attended one national conference for social science teachers. Moreover, she personally paid for the majority of costs of participating in this professional development, including registration fees, airfare, and food. Through her resourcefulness, she applied for and was awarded a merit-based scholarship to cover housing expenses. Carmen’s desire to go was rooted in her wanting to rejuvenate herself after a longtime teaching career. She believed that by doing so, she could rekindle her energy and add to her instructional and content knowledge as a U.S. history teacher, thereby enhancing the learning experiences of her middle school students.

Since serving as a teacher-leader on the SSC, Carmen has actively sought out national social science conferences. She excitedly shares about one conference that took place in New Orleans, which she describes as “amazing,” as she was able to “see the perspective of the South through the eyes of the South when learning about U.S. history.” Carmen was moved when walking through former slave plantations, and valued learning new information and networking with teachers from around the country. “My scope of American history has definitely widened and I was able to enhance my lessons and brought back...what I learned from those workshops,” she confirms. Thus, for a Filipino American teacher, breaking the silence can mean learning to move beyond one’s cultural upbringing and speaking up for one’s individual worth. In this case, Carmen reflects

having the confidence to ask her school site to invest in her professional growth and development financially.

Yet, within this context of being a Filipino American teacher, Carmen's voice as the president of a local, community-based Filipino American Educators Association (FAEA), did not fully translate within her being at Hamilton Middle School²⁹. If Carmen had been a member of the SSC sooner, what other issues could she have potentially expressed her thoughts and feelings toward? Would an experience such as SSC earlier on possibly have given her the sense of confidence to speak up in other faculty and administrative settings? What impact can prolonged silence have on the lived experiences of Filipino American teachers? In spite of what can be characterized as a long overdue revealing of this particular lifeworld, once silence has been broken, continuing conversations can serve to unveil further what it genuinely means to be a Filipino American teacher.

At the same time, when a person, who is racially, ethnically and culturally different from society's mainstream speaks up, being embraced may not be the outcome.

I am the one outside the group
 outside the circle
 the one who fell through
 the holes in the net
 The stranger
 the outsider
 I came close
 and you said come closer;
 and I made every effort -
 eager, naïve and persistent -
 but you had sophistication;
 you always have sophistication;
 and you played with me;

²⁹ Pseudonym

...all the while
 I was the stranger, the outsider
 And you whispered to one another
 while your smooth talk was practiced and distinct
 I was the stranger, am the outsider
 which you knew all the while
 which I only saw late in the hour
 and so I live now at the borders, at the periphery
 and now when we walk past each other
 we gaze at each other with caution
 with careful disregard
 (Arumugam, n.d.)

Arumugam's (n.d.) poem reflects an existence of being an outsider. In spite of genuinely engaging with those of the status quo, in hopes of being welcomed, being included, the poet finds himself instead to be gazed upon as a perpetual "stranger," the focus of "whispered" words and on "the periphery" of society. His voice and his words were evidently not enough, for he continues to live as an *other*. Thus, Arumugam leaves us wondering: will belonging ever come?

From Otherness to Belonging

Being a Filipino American teacher can mean being culturally silent as to voicing one's professional concerns when among non-Filipino teachers and administrators. Moreover, silence may also be experienced when a Filipino American teacher finds that his fellow Filipino American teachers do not come together to dialogue and collectively address the struggles of Filipino American students at his campus. What Filipino American teachers may or may not do in their adult interactions, does such carry over to their interactions with Filipino American children? Was it an anomaly that Rosalie sought to break with traditional Filipino culture by nurturing the developing voices of the Filipina American students in her classroom, hoping that the girls would not become

silent in light of their family background? What are the lived experiences of Filipino American teachers when they encounter Filipino American students?

Anthony began his classroom teaching career at an urban, Title I public elementary school, where racially the students were predominately African American and Latino. At Washington Elementary³⁰, he was one of two Asian American teachers; his colleague was of Korean descent. Anthony reflects that the only Asian person the students associated with him was a Chinese actor:

All they knew was Jackie Chan. They swore that like I could be like Jackie Chan because I'm Asian, right, or whatever, and the fact of the matter is...the Filipinos were the most obscure, right? They're the most obscure in terms of that community because...there aren't too many [Filipinos]...that they can recognize.

Within this school site context, Anthony and his Korean colleague were viewed as representing the experiences of all Asian Pacific Islanders. He explains with a sense of anguish, "I felt like I had to always...represent...a larger thing." Moreover, as a Filipino American teacher, Anthony became more associated with traditional food from the Philippines. For example, he shared that during family nights on campus his mother would bring *lumpia* and *pancit*. According to Anthony, "Like that's all I became known for...the food. 'Are you bringing those *lumpias*?' And I was like, uh. So there's like [these] little things, but it was just...cause [they] were endeared to it...to them, because again I'm like this only [Filipino] representative." For him, being a Filipino American teacher at Washington Elementary reflected a limited spoken experience, not too much further than naming his ethnicity.

When moving to another school site, however, Anthony unexpectedly broke his silence as a Filipino American teacher with the handful of students of Filipino heritage at

³⁰ Pseudonym

Cedar Charter School³¹. The initial connection began when a fourth-grade student named Maryann³² greeted him good morning in Tagalog. Once the rest of the Filipino American students learned that he was Filipino too, he said that he found them “gravitating towards [him] all year long and all of last year.” Maryann excitedly shared with Anthony what she brought to school for lunch: “ ‘Guess what my grandmother made?’ I was like, what? And she was like, ‘her...really delicious *mungo*.’ And...I was like, what did she put in it? And she’s like, ‘of course *chicharron!*’ ”

Have You Eaten?

The first question I am readily asked when entering a traditional Filipino home is: “Have you eaten?” Food is a Filipino cultural expression of love. At Filipino gatherings, food is usually overly abundant. Such bounty seeks to ensure that guests not only leave with their taste buds tickled and hunger satisfied, but they can also traditionally take a generous portion of *baon*, or leftovers, home. Thereby, that expression of love physically goes with you as you take leave of the host. Moreover, Filipino food serves as a source of cultural and relational connectedness, as boisterous conversations commonly arise at gatherings about recipes and particular dishes, along with heartfelt praises and thanks which are directed towards the maker of the meal - “*Masarap*, how delicious!” Thus, food has a central place in and among the lives of Filipino people, one that transcends physical nourishment. It is therefore not surprising that the Filipino American teacher-student relationship that developed between Anthony and Maryann was nurtured by conversations about such favorite cultural foods as *mungo*.

³¹ Pseudonym

³² Pseudonym

Ramos found that through conversations with Filipino American students about Filipino food, she was able to dispel notions of Filipinos as an *other* in the classroom. During a dialogue in a class on human geography, “I was bringing up *dinuguan*...that’s where the otherness comes,” as she explains that this traditional dish includes the ingredient of pig’s blood. As a Filipino American teacher, she seeks to affirm and connect culturally with Filipino American students in ways that a non-Filipino teacher may not. In that conversation about a perceived foreign food, within a classroom of Filipino and non-Filipino students, Ramos explains:

...[then] comes all of a sudden that commonality...with five or six [Filipino] students that know what I’m talking about...I have this connection with [them] that I’m not going to have...with everybody else...that’s what I see as otherness. Not that [a non-Filipino is] being excluded, but it’s...those kind of conversations where only a few are in the know...it’s not shared by everyone.

Thus, being a Filipino American teacher can mean speaking up to dispel feelings of *otherness* when among all students, and particularly for Filipino American youth.

O be still, while
 You are still alive,
 And all things live around you
 Speaking (I do not hear)
 To your own being,
 Speaking by the Unknown,
 That is in you and in
 themselves.
 (Merton, 1957)

In this stanza of Merton’s (1957) poem, *In Silence*, he asks one to “be still” or sit with the silence that surrounds us in this life(world). First, by speaking “To [one’s] own being” as a Filipino American teacher, then, she can seek to uncover “the Unknown” or the unspoken of that existence. Moreover, by doing so, “That [which] is in [her]” can perhaps be seen and spoken by Filipino American students “in themselves” in relationship to their

Filipino American teacher. For example, when sitting with students during a classroom conversation that evolved to include a “foreign” traditional Filipino food, Ramos publicly embraced her own racial and ethnic being while affirming and speaking to the identity of the Filipino American students in the classroom.

Arendt (1958/1998) writes that “...with each birth something uniquely comes into the world...this somebody who is unique it can be truly said that no one was there before” (p. 178). This uniqueness, however, may not be celebrated within the *public sphere*, or the space outside of the household. According to Arendt, society, which she defines as the collectivity of families, “expects from each of its members a certain kind of behavior, imposing innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to ‘normalize’ its members, to make them behave” (p. 40). In response to a conforming society, she calls one to action and to speak to “the question asked of every newcomer: ‘Who are you?’ ”. Moreover, Arendt describes “the actualization of the human condition of plurality,” whereby one is able to live “as a distinct and unique being among equals” (p. 178). Thus, being a Filipino American teacher can mean taking action in the public space of a school, bringing what is unknown and unique about the Filipino culture verbally into the open of a classroom, and potentially helping to change perceptions of *otherness* into belonging. Anthony writes: “I always felt that I had to keep a lower profile on being Pilipino³³ because no teacher or role model represented it other than family and friends.” Now, as a

³³ The word Pilipino reflects that the native Philippine language of Tagalog does not have the sound of the letter f. Filipino Americans may choose to refer to themselves as Pilipino to express a sense of cultural identity and a recognition of the colonial legacy in the Philippines, upon which the country’s native languages were impacted. For instance, according to Center for Philippine Studies at the University of Hawai’i at Manoa (n.d.), the letters f, v, q, x and z were added to the Filipino alphabet as a result of colonial rule.

Filipino American teacher, "...who can understand the family dynamics and...cultural background, that makes a HUGE difference. I[,] too[,] would have liked to see that in my teachers growing up."

For Anthony, affirming Filipino food with a Filipino American child means not only honoring the student's cultural identity, but also his own as a Filipino American teacher. "I remember growing up and feeling weird when I had...a lunch that my mom prepared [for] me that wasn't peanut butter and jelly...the Filipino beef steak...I was like no, like I love it, but...not in front of the [non-Filipino] kids." Therefore, when Maryann brings Filipino food to school and her classmates question, "What is that?" Anthony responds, "Oh lucky you!" He believes that not being silent "makes a difference" for her. "I remember [Filipino] lunches...just to be...not...afraid to say...I have chicken *tinola*...my mom made me some...to have that kind of comfort zone to reaffirm...we [are] both Filipino." Thus, being a Filipino American teacher can mean vividly remembering what it can be like to be a Filipino American student in a U.S. school – being seen as an *other*. Then acting upon those memories, a Filipino American teacher may choose to speak up for a Filipino American child in his midst, with the aim of preventing her from experiencing such painfully similar, isolating moments.

Dispelling Otherness - A Kapwa Connection

The Filipino American teacher-to-student relationship between Anthony and Maryann proved to move beyond food. Although Maryann was not in Anthony's class, she always sought him out. "Every day she checks in. Now she runs into my room," he explains. Anthony saw Maryann on the playground crying one school day. She was walking with an instructional aide who told Anthony that Maryann wanted a hug from

him. Moving beyond his comfort zone, "...I don't give hugs," Anthony shared. Yet, he embraced her. Maryann then quietly sat down next to him. Based upon some prior information, he had a sense that her parents were divorcing. He asked:

Is it a home problem? "Yes." Does it have to do with your parents? "Yes." Are they separating? And she's like crying. And so I let her know...I was like...no matter what, remind her that you represent the best of them...it's never going to be about you...and you know that you can always come to me.

Anthony further reflects on this heartfelt conversation with Maryann: "On that level, the connection, and just understanding...how strong like family means," is important, especially to Filipinos. "I got to keep like...drawing upon that connection...drawing upon the things that we...can both understand or relate to."

Anthony also connected with Maryann's brother, Michael,³⁴ a second grader.

Michael was described as a "terror...who tears up the school," and Anthony took it upon himself to help Michael to think about his behavior at school. Anthony explains:

I'd always be like talking to him. I was like, "Michael, you my peoples man. You my peoples. You got to...represent better, right?" And so like now it's a joke. He's like, "My peoples, my peoples. Mr. Anthony, you my peoples, right?" And I was like, "Yes, Michael! Yeah, you my peoples. Let's get it together! Let's represent!"

As the sole Filipino American teacher at the site, Anthony challenged Michael to be the best student he could be, as the child "represented" being Filipino American to the school community. According to Anthony, saying "we peoples" to Michael is "funny because...what does that mean? And how...do we build...just kind of...inadvertently *being* that...comfort spot...that kind of comfort zone to reaffirm like, yeah, we both Filipino." For Anthony, connecting for the first time with Filipino American students as a Filipino American teacher was quite a profound experience. "I never had that connection

³⁴ Pseudonym

before [to Filipino students]. I've always connected to Black [African American] and Brown [Latino] youth in many ways and this is funny," he further reflects.

Greene (1995) writes, "It seems clear that most people find out who they are only when have developed some power to act and choose in engagements with a determinate world" (p. 178). In speaking-up for Maryann and expressing to Michael that "we peoples," Anthony seemed to find himself for the first time *being* a Filipino American teacher. This is an identity that he does not readily embrace, as he feels that he lacks a comprehensive knowledge of Filipino American history, and the racial backgrounds of the students in his classrooms have been predominately African American and Latino. Yet, in these initial cultural connections with Filipino American students, Anthony evidently found meaning in *being* a Filipino American teacher. He explains, "...it feels interesting...I never had a Filipino student, so to have Filipino students in [this] school...I think that's great...I used to feel like this extra burden of...representing all Asian Pacific Islander cultures...[now] it's cool when you can connect." Thus, it represented a transformational moment for Anthony, for no longer was *being* a Filipino American teacher a "burden." The Old English origin of the word *burden*, or *byrden*, means 'a load' or 'weight' to bear (Online Etymology Dictionary). As he reflected upon the interactions he had with Maryann and Michael, Anthony had a sense of lightness about him. Evidently, the previous weight of expectations of Anthony by non-Filipino colleagues and students to be the all Asian Pacific Islander teacher, had been lifted. He now had the opportunity to become comfortable "in his own skin," being a Filipino American teacher, as he supported the personal and school challenges faced by the Filipino American students in his midst.

Anthony's words to Michael and Maryann of "we peoples" and "we both Filipino," speak to the traditional Filipino core value of *kapwa* (De Guia, 2005). As discussed in Chapter One, *kapwa* is the sense of identity shared between Filipinos, whereby oneself and the other person are extensions of one another. Gail explains that if she and a Filipino American child saw one another, "...we wouldn't ask each other that question [Are you Filipino?] because we knew...you knew that you shared...the same background...we could talk about that same thing." Thus, when a Filipino sees another Filipino, they *see themselves*. Moreover, *kapwa* is a recognition of the humanness between individuals, as it aims to address, connect with, and be inclusive of people.

Gadamer (1960/2004) writes:

...language has its true being only in dialogue, coming to an understanding...[which] is a life process in which a community of life is lived out...For language is by nature the nature of conversation; it fully realizes itself only in the process of coming to an understanding. (p. 443)

Through the language of "we peoples" and undergirded by the Filipino notion of *kapwa*, Anthony engaged in conversations with Michael and Maryann. Anthony's words publicly declared that "I see you" and I will *be* there, as the three of them dialectically came to realize and understand their lived racial, ethnic, and cultural connections as a Filipino American teacher and Filipino American students. Anthony, with a sense of longing and purpose recalls, "I didn't have someone to look to." There was not a Filipino American teacher, "to say hey, that was like me." For the first time, Anthony experienced sharing a school site space with Filipino American students. Furthermore, in the spirit of *kapwa*, Anthony's speech and actions welcomed Maryann and Michael into the plurality of the school community as the unique Filipino American children they are.

Van Manen (1997) writes that the existential of *lived other* represents “the lived relation we maintain with others in the interpersonal space that we share with them” (p. 104). Being a Filipino American teacher can mean living out a *relationality* with Filipino American students, one that is fostered by a shared racial, ethnic, and cultural background and understanding. Moreover, a Filipino American teacher-student relational existence may transcend the formal classroom setting, as not only seen in Anthony’s lived experiences, but Ramos’ as well.

In this current digital age of social media, Ramos’ former students often reconnect with her online. One Filipina American young woman is an example. Melissa³⁵ had already graduated from college and was living in Los Angeles when she reached out to Ramos.

She was telling me...on Facebook about how her parents were very controlling and she wasn’t allowed to do this and do that because she was a girl. And [this was] despite the fact that she had already graduated from college and she had done this and done that...I immediately messaged her. I was like, you know what, I know...what you’re talking about...this is what I had to experience and this is what I had to get through in order to get to where I am now. So I think when I have conversations like that...I understand – (about) Filipino parents.

In that *kapwa* moment, Ramos saw her past self. She writes that Melissa shared how, “...her much younger brother had all the freedoms...that she did not” – a gender “inequity” or double-standard of parental expectations and privileges that Ramos also experienced in contrast to her brother. She shared with Melissa that she had read the book *Warrior Lessons: An Asian American Woman’s Journey into Power* (1999) during a time when Ramos and her mother often fought, as the traditional Filipino values in their home regularly conflicted with western, American ones (e.g. adhering to collective,

³⁵ Pseudonym

family expectations versus pursuing individual goals). Ramos writes, “I shared with her a book that helped me out...that helped me realize where my mother was coming from...In our conversation, [Melissa] told me that it did help her [by] talking with someone who knew what she was going through.” For Ramos, such conversations give her a sense of satisfaction, knowing that she can help and affirm another Filipino American young person, someone who reminds her of who she is too.

Thus, being a Filipino American teacher can mean speaking out loud with Filipino American students about one’s personal experiences growing up as a Filipino American child. Such sharing by a Filipino American teacher could potentially reassure a younger Filipina woman that she is not alone. As Ramos writes, in reference to her dialogue with Melissa, “I wish someone could have me told when I was in the same place...letting [me] know that it was going to be ok.”

A Being at Home

According to Gail, as a Filipino American teacher, “you have a camaraderie” with Filipino American students:

You have this and I think it’s the idea of...when you go home, it’s like this. I know when you go home, you might be eating this and...it’s comforting and...in a way, I look for them [Filipino American students]. Like not only do we make that connection, but as they go through their day, I’m looking...for them and...I want to know about how they’re doing in their classroom or...I would go and I’ll...find them at recess or something and I will specifically have that conversation, “So...how’s school doing?” and...you have an ownership of it. You have a camaraderie. You have a connection and...I just think...it’s endearing.

The 1840 French origin of *camaraderie* derived from *camarade*, means a ‘comrade’ – ‘one who shares the same room’ (Online Etymology Dictionary). Thus, Filipino American teachers and Filipino American students inhabit a distinctive *lived space* (van Manen, 1997). Van Manen writes: “Home is where we can *be* what *we are*. ...lived space

is the existential theme that refers us to the world or landscape in which human beings move and find themselves at home” (p. 102). Gail, thus, describes how Filipino American teachers, in their relational and spatial existence with Filipino American students, may be creating a sense of home for themselves and children of Filipino descent within the classroom and on the playground. An example of such is when a Filipino American teacher affirms at a school site the traditional Filipino food and language that reside within the homes from which she and a Filipino American student may come. The Old English origin of the word home, or *ham*, is that of a ‘dwelling place.’ Moreover, from the Old Norse of *heimr*, home is a ‘residence’ and ‘world’ (Online Etymology Dictionary). Thus, for a Filipino American teacher *to be* at a school, is for her to reside in an educational world. Yet, a classroom is not only her lived-in teaching space, for by her presence it can also be a place in which Filipino American students racially and culturally comfortably dwell.

Filling a Void

Possible connections between two persons first begin with what is physically seen. Van Manen (1997) writes that *lived body* phenomenologically reflects our bodily existence in the world. Initially, we experience one another corporeally, an encounter in which both the revealing and concealing of oneself occur. Rosalie thinks about the potential impact of her own physical presence at her campus for Filipino American students. “I think...I fill that void of seeing someone of...Filipino descent in the [field] of education, where they’ve never seen it before. ...I think I fill that void for my students in the classroom,” she said. The 1610 origin of the word *void* is that of an ‘unfilled space,

gap' (Online Etymology Dictionary), seemingly a sense of emptiness. Moreover, in outer space, a void is characterized as being cold and dark (Nemiroff & Bonnell, 2007).

The void that Rosalie speaks of may initially reflect her recollection of the racial and cultural gap she experienced in high school, at a campus of predominately White students, faculty, and staff. What helped her to begin to feel a greater sense of fullness at the school, was connecting with a Filipina American counselor: "Oh, I was so excited! It's like there's someone on this campus that looks like me," recalled Rosalie. Moreover, Rosalie had a lightness in her voice as she described how the counselor's racial, ethnic, and cultural presence impacted her own sense of *Being* at the campus: "I do belong here...I'm just not a visitor...this is my school." O'Donohue (1999) writes, "In order to *be*, we need to *belong*" (p. 71). Moreover, "The hunger to belong is at the heart of our nature...There is some innocent child-like side to the human heart that is always deeply hurt when we are excluded. Belonging suggests warmth, understanding, and embrace" (pp. xxi-xxii). Thus, for Rosalie, the cultural affirmation and academic guidance she received from the counselor "was comforting" to her. In that relationship, Rosalie felt cared for.

Casey (2009) writes, "We care about places as well as people, so much so that we can say that *caring belongs to places*" (p. 175). Evidently, such a caring presence is what Rosalie seeks to be for her Filipino American students as well, as she expresses: "...how nice does it feel to feel like you look like me and I do belong." In belonging, one feels a sense of being home. According to Casey, "We care about places in many ways, but in building on them – *building with them*, indeed *building them* – they become the ongoing

‘stars of our life,’ that to which we turn when we travel and to which we return when we come back home” (pp. 175-176).

As a Filipino American teacher, Rosalie continues to be guided by that past horizontal star, whereby in her somewhat wayward adolescence she experienced a building-up of herself with the help of a Filipina American educator. Rosalie not only returns to that transformational moment of being at home within the educational setting, but she also seeks to cultivate and build such an interior place of care within her classroom for her students, and in particular, being mindful of those of Filipino descent.

Narciso also speaks about what he sees as a potential sense of empowerment and inspiration that the embodiment of a Filipino American teacher could *be* on a public school campus for Filipino American students:

There’s something about seeing somebody that you might even just imagine...I think...students have a set imagination of what school is. Who...involves school right? Who are the figures and bodies and the ways of behaving, right? The things we read in [these] picture books and that’s school...and so when maybe there’s somebody that looks like you there, you’re now part of that imagination for the young person...that I think is healing in ways that maybe is even hard to describe like, when we watch American Idol and see a Filipino. It’s that same kind of affinity or [boxer Manny] Pacquiao...there’s something about going to this public environment and you see a reflection of something that looks like you.

As a Filipino American child, I never imagined becoming a Filipino American teacher, for no such images existed around me. Bachelard (1958/1994) asks us “to consider the imagination as a major power of human nature” (p. xxxiv). He further writes, “By the swiftness of its actions, the imagination separates us from the past as well as from reality; it faces the future” (p. xxxiv). Thus, the notion of imagination involves moving beyond perceived limitations, particularly in transcending what may be viewed as impossible in our current, physical landscape. According to Maverick, the presence of a

Filipino American teacher can open Filipino American students to possibilities of themselves that they might otherwise have not imagined: being a Filipino American teacher. She reflects:

...when I was growing up I didn't have any Filipino teachers...in all of elementary and secondary school. *So in my mind, Filipinos did not become teachers...* I think had I been taught by a Filipino teacher...I would have aspired to be one a lot sooner than I did...because all the Filipinos I knew...were accountants...in the medical profession, engineers. You know, that was like the typical Filipino...now when I see my [classroom] kids in here...the first thing they do is they ask me, "Are you Filipino? I'm Filipino, too."...And I think it gives them [students]...another option to think about, like...I'm Filipino and I could...teach, too.

According to O'Donohue (1999), "The human body longs for presence...The body is one of the most open and manifest presences in the world" (p. 59). Therefore, in addition to being able to affirm that a Filipino American student belongs within a school community, the presence of a Filipino American teacher can also serve as a corporeal validation that being of Filipino descent is a part of the rich fabric of a classroom, and in particular, in the role of a teacher.

Beyond the potential bodily impact of a Filipino American teacher, Narciso references the "public environment" of schools, reflecting Arendt's (1958/1998) notion of the public space – that which is outside of the household. Moreover, she writes that the larger society sets standards to which it calls individuals to readily conform to within the public space. Narciso's words evidently bring to bear how the public presence of a Filipino American teacher breaks the sense of racial conformity within the K-12 teacher population, a demographic that is predominately White. Furthermore, a Filipino American teacher in the public space of a classroom serves as an opportunity to speak to the question: "Who are you?" (Arendt, 1959/1998, p. 178). Moreover, in heeding

Arendt's call of valuing one's uniqueness within humanity's plurality, thereby challenging the potential diminishment that societal conformity can bring, we are harkened back to the inquisition of Coletrane: What are you doing here – being a Filipino American teacher?

One answer is brought forth by Narciso, as he describes a sense of healing that a Filipino American teacher may bring to a classroom. The Gothic origin of the word heal, or *gahailjan*, is 'to make whole' (Online Etymology Dictionary). Narciso's words seem to reflect how being a Filipino American teacher may serve a balm for the pain that he and his family experienced when his mother's Philippine teaching degree was not honored in the United States. As a result, she was seen as lacking the credentials to serve as a public school teacher in America. To financially support her family she worked two jobs, which meant long hours away from her sons, and what Narciso described as he and his brother having to "toughen up...[and] weather through" the time apart. For Narciso, the non-recognition of his mother's education and the subsequent emotional and monetary hardship experienced by his family, remain as powerful past horizons – ones that he continues to carry with him fifteen years into his teaching career.

My mother
A teacher in the Philippines
Turned teacher's aide in the US
Has...something to do with it...

Questioning my immigrant culture's blind insistence
Seamless correlation
Between educational achievement and
Financial stability perhaps

Damn...maybe I should write my thesis paper on that...

School, school, school
bukol
 School be given me a *bukol*
 But mom's don't know
 Just like I don't know
 How to try and simplify why
 5/6s of her annual
 525,600 minutes
 is spent working each year

No spring summer winter break here
 No vacation time off
 Still haven't gone back to Pampanga Philippines
 Restless homeland memories

What did you do this past summer essay?
 Make up something, so I can get on my way...

My mother
 A teacher in the Philippines
 Turned teacher's aide
 Slash moonlighting as a minimum wage
 Convalescent hospital laundry aide
 In the US
 Has...something to do with it...
 (Narciso, 2003)

Narciso wrote this poem and included the piece as part of his application to a teacher credential program, as he sought a creative way in which to speak to his mother's exclusion from the American teaching profession and how it served as a poignant impetus for him to become a teacher. Thus, being a Filipino American teacher can mean bringing a sense of healing to the teacher himself – by *being the teacher* his Filipina immigrant parent did not become in the United States. Such a lived experience reflects a Filipino son and mother coming full circle as teachers. Strikingly, for five of the eight Filipino American teachers in the study, one parent was an elementary or secondary school teacher in the Philippines who did not teach after immigrating to America.

Seeing Oneself as a Filipino American Teacher

Our images are really duplicated When we look at ourselves in a certain
 Mirror just to know What's going on with ourselves...It is mutual to look at
 Ourselves in a mirror and A mirror looks at ourselves...A mirror gives us
 something About our true or untrue personalities... We can not distance
 ourselves from Any mirror simply because It shows our real world...
 We clearly hide ourselves Either in front of a mirror or Behind it...
 We need to know about faces and Even about many hidden things We have
 them in ourselves...The world of mirrors reflect ourselves clearly To that
 extent in which We discover our true truth fully...
 (Skati, 2016)

In *A Mirror Looks At Us*, Skati (2016) poeticizes about a mirror as the object that enables us to see a reflection of ourselves in a corporeal sense, with regards to “[knowing] about faces.” Yet, there are limitations to what a mirror can truly reveal as “We clearly hide ourselves Either in front of a mirror or Behind it.” Thus, these “...many hidden things” about *being* a Filipino American teacher are what this phenomenological study seeks to uncover. It is a search to “...discover [their] true truth [more] fully.” When a Filipino American looks behind the mirror of her physical self, what does she see? What does he encounter between the mirror and the “real world?” How do they feel about such an existence?

Seeing Multiple Reflections: Being a Filipino American Teacher and a Teacher of Color

Mirror creator Angel Gilding (2017) writes that mirrors can reflect the same image differently: “...what you see also depends on where you stand and where you place the object – the angles of incidence and reflection.” Therefore, one’s placement in relation to a mirror can result in seeing multiple reflections. When a Filipino American teacher is placed within a teaching staff that is predominately or all White, she may find herself seeing a different identity – namely that of being a teacher of color, particularly in

moments angled by racial incidence. A number of Filipino American teachers in this study say that they identify as teachers of color too.

For instance, Gail describes that at a school site community outreach meeting that included parents, teachers, and the principal, a father of a student of color at the school expressed, "...you don't have anyone who looks like me, and you're going to go get kids who don't look like me, and I don't see you doing those meetings on my side of the [school] boundaries." With the exception of the man's wife and Gail, all the other attendees were White. "...[B]eing the other person of color in the meeting," Gail says that she "felt compelled" to address his statement. "I felt like I needed...to answer it," she recalls. The Latin origin of the word compel, or *compellere*, is 'to drive together, to drive one place' (Online Etymology Dictionary). Having the drive to keep the school and community members together, Gail chose not to be silent.

In that moment, Gail reflects upon *being a teacher of color*. According to a 2016 U.S. Department of Education study, the teachers in America's elementary and secondary schools are overwhelmingly White – 82%. Gail states that as a teacher whose "brown skin" is "[seen] right off visually," the Latino parent's words seemed to resonate with her and she thought about the possible, deeper meaning. "I think in his mind...he...was thinking...I want you to come to my neighborhood...when I open up my door...my view is not the same view as you. Please come over and open and see the view." Moreover, "I wanted to reassure him," says Gail as she explains to the group that Latino families were choosing to have their children attend the Science Technology Engineering Art and Mathematics (STEAM) campus. Thus, it was the school's goal to increase the attendance

of other racial groups in the neighborhood, not to exclude children and families of Latino descent.

Gail's compelling moment reflects how being a Filipino American teacher can also mean seeing oneself as a teacher of color, being a part of a racial collectivity, and at certain times, choosing to speak-up as a teacher of color. Her experiences of singularly vocalizing racial, ethnic and cultural perspectives that may be different than the status quo, have been encountered by other teachers of color as well. For example, a Latino teacher shared: "There's a constant battle...and it becomes uncomfortable when you're the only one who is pointing things out...Anytime you speak up you're perceived as aggressive, adversarial, noncompliant, defiant" (Griffin, 2018, p. 7). In addition, an African American teacher expressed how being a teacher of color can reflect an exclusionary existence: "Because you don't even see what I can bring to the table...[A]ll you do see is that I don't belong at your table" (Griffin & Tackie, 2016, p. 11).

When Carmen began her classroom teaching career, she was hired at a high school where the student and staff populations were predominately White, and where she was "the only person of color." She describes, "I did feel...pressure...to be the good teacher of color." Her feelings resonate with the experiences of an African American teacher:

I feel like there's a level of professionalism that I have always kind of internalized, like I need to be on my P's and Q's, because I'm the Black woman...I don't want to be judged as not being professional....I wanted to make sure I was always dressed professionally...punctual...that's because I was...being looked at by my fellow colleagues. (Griffin & Tackie, 2016)

According to Griffin and Tackie (2016), "Black teachers feel pressured to police their own behavior so they could be seen as more professional," particularly when they

encounter perceptions by others as being “too loud or too harsh” (p. 9). The late 14th Century meaning of the word pressure is ‘an act or fact of pressing on the mind or heart’ (Online Etymology Dictionary). Carmen writes that in that pressurized space, “...being the only teacher of color made me feel lonely and isolated.”

Moreover, in one of the Spanish language classes that she taught, she encountered students who were openly White supremacist skinheads. In her heart and mind, Carmen “felt out of place,” finding that it was a difficult space *to be* a Filipino American teacher. She continues:

I was so glad that at my next school there were Filipino teachers as well as a Filipino administrator who I could identify with. [It] made me feel that people like me, of my culture, are strong, and together we can make a difference [for]...students that are not just Filipino, but...students of all backgrounds.

In their study of the school site experiences of Black teachers, Griffin and Tackie (2016) write: “...this project provides evidence exposing the racial bias that exists in schools and school systems across the nation” (p. 11). Carmen’s racialized, isolating encounters as a Filipino American teacher and teacher of color, serve to further support those research findings.

Living in the Curriculum as a Teacher of Color

At this second school site, Carmen’s identity as a teacher of color evolved to include her perspectives regarding curriculum. She explains that as “a teacher of color I feel I always have a responsibility...to provide multicultural perspectives” in her U.S. history classes. For example, “...last year I had a kid who was of Cambodian descent and he’s really into his Cambodian history, so we talk about [the] Khmer Rouge.” Yet, she cites that her challenge to doing so is the constraint of time, as she must teach certain state curriculum standards over the course of the school year. Their discussion about

Cambodia was brief as she shared, "...I told him, unfortunately...That's for 10th grade U.S. history." Aoki (2005) writes that this tension of time with regards to curriculum can be an ongoing struggle for teachers. That lively moment for Carmen and her Cambodian student regarding the history of the latter's homeland, reflect what Aoki calls a "curriculum-as-lived-experience," whereby Carmen "... [led her student] out into new possibilities" (pp. 160-161), which Aoki characterizes as education.

The sense of excitement that Carmen's student displayed in the midst of their curriculum-as-lived conversation reflects "the aliveness of school life as lived by teachers and students" (p. 165). In contrast, according to Aoki, such teacher-student interactions can be subsumed by "curriculum-as-plan" (p. 160), curriculum readily developed by planners who are removed from classroom teachers and students. Moreover, such curriculum is "imbued with the planners' orientation of the world, which inevitably include [sic] their own interests and assumptions about ways of knowing and about how teachers and students are to be understood" (p. 160). Thus, with the notion of teachers as simply carrying out the installation of curriculum, instrumentalism can flavor curriculum-as-plan.

On the other hand, curriculum-as-lived is a dialectical experience, not learning that is limited by a linear scope and design. Curriculum-as-lived is situated within a world in which students and teachers look into one another's faces, and where the unique needs and nuances of students are experienced by the teacher within their living classroom. Moreover, curriculum-as-lived is not a reduction of knowledge and learning into a singular, one-size-fits-all curriculum that is waiting to be implemented by teachers in a technocratic manner, whereby "good teaching is reduced to mere technical

effectiveness” (p. 163). Thus, in the instrumentation of curriculum-as-plan, the uniqueness of students can be eclipsed.

The question of curriculum is also reflected in Narciso’s identification of being a teacher of color. He explains:

...being, taking on the identity of a teacher of color...[is] rework[ing] the curriculum so that it is actually reflecting a perspective that honors the students’ culture and their background, their language...to embody that is to actively use those opportunities, those learning moments that are a part of the everyday...[the] culture and vibe [of] how the kids have developed...And be ready to...use those in our curriculum...bring them into the conversation.

Narciso describes his approach to curriculum as a “relational kind of practice,” whereby he seeks to be inclusive of the perspectives of his students’ culture, language, history, and family. As he works at a high school where Filipino and Latino students are the predominate racial groups, he believes:

With my students...there’s...a conscious sort of active effort to...place identity and experience and history, language, all the different ways culture expresses itself and...to...validate that. Validating...means...there’s room in the classroom for those parts of yourself to...enter here and to be part of some aspects of our conversations.

One way that conversations can be facilitated is through the curriculum. Narciso desires to enable the voices of his students to be celebrated and deemed credible within the classroom, as “maybe the larger society doesn’t value...that student or that student’s community.” Thus, in the public space of the classroom, he is evidently transcending the notion of conformity. He shares:

...it’s about bringing those things in that I think sometimes feel like they’re not legitimate topics of conversation...legitimate ways of being, legitimate concerns...I think [in] schools and classrooms there is some normativity to them...we have rules and regulations...procedures...protocols. And I think that those are important...at the same time, there’s all that other stuff that falls outside...That’s where the students are...where their experiences are...where their emotions are...where their thoughts are...So if I have...all these sort[s] of borders

and boundaries and restrictions and lines about what's allowed to enter into the classroom, then...[t]he students don't feel like they can feel engaged. They don't feel like they can speak from their truth of what's happening right now and then understand that and then maybe try to bridge it into another place...there's only certain conversations that are allowed to happen, *certain ways of being* that are allowed to happen in the classroom.

Narciso's experiences speak to what Aoki (2005) writes as the privileging of metanarratives in curriculum-as-plan, whereby certain stories are deemed as "the truth," and viewed as being derived through "rational" thinking. Moreover, these dominant narratives can serve to delegitimize "the lived curriculum, the more poetic, phenomenological and hermeneutic discourse in which life is embodied in the very stories and languages people speak and live" (p. 207). Thereby, as Narciso sees as a teacher of color, the language and conversations of students can be limited by such metanarratives. Furthermore, the privileging of particular stories within the curriculum can potentially restrict the ways of being for students and teachers in the classroom.

Thus, in the midst of his curricular aims as a teacher of color, Narciso too, experiences the tension between curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived. He writes:

...negotiating the tension between "what's possible" and accepting the reality of "what is" means being able to discern and "choose my battles" responding to whatever the constraints and limitations are at the moment. Shall I spend additional hours scouring for new resources, activities, texts and replace previously created curriculum because the cultural-historical-political-economic moment has shifted? Maybe I'll keep what was already planned and make the most of it? This is one concrete way this tension of possibility vs. what exists.

Thus, Narciso, *being* a teacher of color, is *living in the tension*. Aoki (2005) writes, "...to be alive is to live in tension...tensionality in [his] pedagogical situation is a mode of being a teacher" (p. 192). In his efforts toward curriculum-as-lived, Narciso seeks to be "more fearless about the text that [he] is going to build to stimulate students' thinking and

their ability to speak about...or write about...or read about something.” For example, he thinks deeply about the texts that are included in his English courses.

We want to do more Filipino American literature in our units. So we need to have professional development about that, that historicizes the literature...you know the canonical literature by White Americans is there...African American literature is there and some of the Latino American voices...if you want to teach the *Crucible*...we have a lot of literature...a lot of curriculum that’s been created about it. And then these other “newer voices”...there’s not enough knowledge and recognition or...exposure to knowing how to frame and situate Filipino American literature or even Asian American literature.

As a teacher of color and Filipino American teacher, Narciso believes that it is important for Filipino Americans to understand their culture and history, including their contributions to the United States. By doing so, one can “give voice to songs” (Aoki, 2005, p. 192), enabling the curriculum to sing more inclusively and to be a melody that meaningfully reflects students’ backgrounds. Yet, to be able to do so within his classes, Narciso has to create the curriculum – which having the additional time and collegial support to do so is lacking. “I haven’t created that lesson yet, but it’s a lesson in my circulation that at some point I’m going to,” he reflects.

Narciso’s culturally-inclusive view of curriculum can reflect that of other teachers of color as well. For example, according to Griffin (2018), Latino teachers in her study state that the incorporation of Latino culture into their classrooms resulted in higher student confidence and feelings of pride. One teacher said: “We are acknowledging where they come from and who they are...when we do that I think it gives them more confidence” (p. 9). This, in turn, may help to foster improvement in academic achievement and rates of high school graduation (The Albert Shanker Institute, 2015).

In his *Being* as a Filipino American teacher, Narciso chooses to dwell “in the zone of between” (Aoki, 2005, p. 161), living in the tension of curriculum-as-plan and

curriculum-as-lived. His commitment to existing in this tensionality evokes a sense of hope and a moving forward. By his dwelling, he is “mak[ing] time for meaning striving and struggling, time for letting things be, time for question, time for singing, time for crying, time for anger, time for praying and hoping” (Aoki, 2005, p. 164), drawing closer to a living curriculum for the being of both his students and himself.

Living In-Between

...being and becoming a teacher and teacher educator has been an experience made richer by the fact of my ethnicity. I regard it as my personal world of my lived experiences, a world in which I participated with others in its very construction. (Aoki, 2005, p. 348)

Gail traveled with a group of Filipino American teachers to the Philippines. The trip involved learning about the Philippine education system, as many students in the community where Gail lives and teaches immigrate to the United States from the Philippines. She reflects, “...being with Filipino Americans in the Philippines and where we were...that wasn’t our country. It was our parents’ country, but yet there was a connection.” Seeing, teaching, and being with students of the same ethnicity, your ethnicity, all in the same school, can be like looking into a mirror.

In spite of that sense of cultural connection, Gail shares, “...my child...says, mom, you’re fake Filipino ‘cause you don’t even speak the language and you don’t cook the food.” Aoki (2005), as a Japanese Canadian writes:

When...I first walked the sidewalks of crowded Tokyo, I experienced a strange feeling that stemmed from being thrust into a sea of black heads, a feeling of belonging and not belonging...Why was I so conscious about being among black heads when the native Japanese were not? Why wasn’t I one of them with them? Perhaps it was because for me to be one with the dominant mainstream group has never been my way of life, ever since I was born. (pp. 333-334)

Gail and Aoki reflect upon existing *in-between* two cultures: the immigrant one of their parents, and the western world they call home. She explains, “I would really have a hard time relating to Filipino immigrants...my culture is American culture.” Being born and reared in the United States, and English being her native language, Gail identifies her culture as being American. She sees her Filipina self in part, corporeally, as she shares that “...being a Filipino American teacher is one...somebody who...looks like me...I come with a background that you...see right off” – short in height, dark hair and brown skin. Secondly, her upbringing by Filipino immigrant parents within a traditional Filipino home, rounds out her Filipino identity. Thus, as a Filipino American teacher, should she meet a Filipino immigrant student or his family, and their first language was a Philippine one, Gail said, “...I would be so committed [to communicating with them] because I would feel like they are my people. They’re Filipino.” Her Filipino ethnicity evidently adds a depth and richness to how she lives as an American teacher.

Ramos shares that being a Filipino American teacher reflects an existence of “in-betweenness.” She explains that she does not identify as being solely Filipino nor only an American, for she was raised *within* a traditional Filipino household *in* America. Ramos ate Filipino and American food growing-up. Moreover, she is fluent in English as a product of American formal schooling, yet can also converse to a certain degree in the Filipino language of Tagalog. Ramos writes that her “ ‘in-betweenness’ gives me a bridge to walk between one culture and [the] other, and understand and empathize with each.” She has experienced this bridge with Filipino American students during conversations regarding cultural identity, including when dialoguing about “foreign,” traditional Filipino food or struggles with the expectations of Filipino immigrant parents.

As a Filipino American teacher, Ramos believes existing *in-between* is “an important capacity to have,” as it can enable her to connect more deeply with students when in conversation. Moreover, she is particularly mindful about how the cultural perspective of a teacher can possibly open-up and potentially shut down classroom dialogue. Ramos writes that as a third grader she was “corrected” by a White teacher when she described a family vacation. “I talked about spending time with my mom’s cousin...[whom] I called my aunt.” Her teacher brought to Ramos’ attention the supposed “incorrect thinking,” for in the western paradigm an aunt would have been Ramos’ mom’s sister, not her cousin. Bachelard (1958/1994) writes: “...the universe of speech governs all of phenomena of being...And languages bears within itself the dialectics of open and closed” (p. 222). According to Ramos, “Being corrected at a young age about something that was part of my culture made me think about how different my family was from the American mainstream, and I had to ‘correct’ myself when I talked to people who were not Filipino.” What is it like to experience your teacher being closed to your culture? The “corrective” words that her teacher spoke continue to impact Ramos’ present horizon as a Filipino American teacher. Thus, she embraces being “in-between,” knowing that her racial, ethnic, and cultural background and experiences can enable an openness and richness to the teaching, learning, and conversations in her classroom.

For Carmen, she describes the space “in between” as a Filipino American teacher as moving between “the Filipino American culture and then the Filipino immigrant culture ‘cause they’re totally different.” This sense of navigating was reflected in her interactions with students of Filipino descent. She writes:

In my conversations with Filipino students regarding their family struggles/challenges, we talked about the generation gaps, the tendency of parents

to be heavy-handed when it came to discipline, the cultural gaps...unlike older Filipina women (native speakers of Tagalog) who usually scold adolescents, I would give advice from a Filipino American point of view.

Moreover, “In my other conversations...we...[talked] about how...it can be growing up with first generation parents and how our parents’ goals for us can sometimes clash with our visions for ourselves.” Then, “For my female Filipina students, we talked about the double standards of parents (favoring their brothers over them).”

Narciso shares that one aspect of the difference between Filipino American students and Filipino immigrant students is that of language. In this particular in-between space, he sees himself as having a certain role as a Filipino American teacher. He explains, “I try to support our Filipino language teacher who works...like an ambassador...kind of a safety space for the Filipino students that are recent immigrants that are taking our classes. And...I see how...I could have a...more active role working with the students that are Filipino American.” Thus, living in-between as a Filipino American teacher can also mean listening to the personal and academic struggles faced by immigrant and American-born Filipino students. Furthermore, applying one’s cultural background and knowledge in the care and support of such young people within the classroom space allows a presence where being flourishes. Aoki (2005) writes:

So placed, I may be allowed to hear the better voice of what teaching essentially is. The question understood in this way urges me to be attuned to a teacher’s presence with children. This presence, if authentic, is being. I find that teaching so understood is attuned to the place where care dwells, a place of ingathering and belonging, where the indwelling of teachers and students is made possible by the presence of care that each has for the other. (p. 191)

Thus, such culturally and ethnically-grounded care, is part of the essence of Being a Filipino American teacher.

Being the Only One

What if Gail had not been at the community outreach meeting the day a Latino father questioned the absence of school officials in his area of the neighborhood? Moreover, as Gail was the only teacher of color, Filipino, in attendance, would a White staff member have felt as compelled as Gail to respond to the parent's wondering? What is it like being the only one, being the sole presence of a Filipino American teacher or teacher of color?

Anthony reflects, "I'm the only Filipino teacher...so it's a burden sometimes." An additional Old English origin of the word *burden*, or *byrden*, is that of a 'charge, duty' (Online Etymology Dictionary). As a Filipino American teacher who has been viewed as supposedly representing the history, background, and experiences of *all* Asian Americans, Anthony was charged with not only carrying quite a heavy load, but perhaps more importantly, rightly fulfilling such a duty would be an impossibility. Anthony's sense of feeling burdened as the only one evidently went further, as he writes:

In a field that is predominately filled with White women...I had to represent my peoples. I had to speak up for others. I wasn't just a teacher of color, but a Pilipino teacher that is recognized by other colonized and exploited people of color, and is seen in struggle and unity with those I serve [as a teacher].

Thus, for Anthony, being the only one means consciously choosing to be a voice for students and families of color who he sees as being impacted by colonization and exploitation. Moreover, he believes in enabling the voices of such young people, as exemplified by his work with the Watts Youth Collective (WYC). The WYC was youth-driven, as many of Anthony's former elementary school students returned to their upper-grade classroom feeling as though they had no space within their middle school to dialogue about their matters of social justice. Their gatherings were after school, on the

weekends and during summer vacation, whereby they discussed and wrestled with notions and theories of social justice, particularly as such thinking applied to their lived racial, economic, and societal experiences. Moreover, the WYC activities expanded to include such neighborhood-based research documentaries as examining racial profiling by local police. According to Anthony, such pursuits served as an opportunity for the WYC youth to present their “truth.”

In Ramos’ lifeworld, being a Filipino American teacher of English literature, can be a lonely existence. She explains:

As a Filipino teacher teaching English, that is interesting, because if you look at my department, I’m the only Asian. Currently I’m the only Asian. ...I’ll look around the room, we had a department meeting the other week and it’s like yeah... White people, White people, we have a Mexican, White people and I’m the only one that’s Filipino.

Yet, in spite of being the only one, her choosing to not only stay in this discipline but to also serve as her department’s curriculum leader, is her love for what she teaches. She reflects, “I love the fact that I can go into...different areas and be very flexible...if I want to talk about...love and passion...I can have...poetry...I can talk about the human existence and that’s what I really enjoy about...teaching this subject. Moreover, Ramos writes, “I feel that I’m able to have that voice to help create representation when it comes to our curriculum.” One addition she made was introducing ninth grade students to Filipino American literature, which included such texts as *America is in the Heart* and *The Mango Bride*. Furthermore, Ramos likes how she, as a Filipino American teacher, lives outside of the stereotype of Asian Americans who traditionally are found working in the Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM) fields:

...you look at that stereotype...Asians, oh, well you’re good at math and it’s like no...I’m not. Let me tell you about the time I failed calculus. So...I think

it's...interesting...sometimes I...wonder...what kids think when they see me teaching English...That's different...from everybody else.

She writes:

I think now as an adult, representation does matter in the classroom. It gives Filipino students an opportunity to see someone like them in a leadership role and hopefully will give them the idea that there are plenty of opportunities out there than just the stereotypical nurse.

Being a Filipino American teacher can mean being the only one at one's school site. Yet, in spite of such a solo existence, he can choose to speak his voice on behalf of children and parents of color more generally who may feel marginalized within an educational community. Moreover, she can be a vital part of the dialogue towards curricula that is more inclusive of students' backgrounds and lived experiences. Thus, the pioneering and vocal presence of one Filipino American teacher has the potential to change the experiential and curricular landscape for children and teachers in meaningful ways.

To Reach the End is to Make a Beginning

When I began my classroom teaching career, I never imagined that I would later pursue a doctorate. After completing my master's degree, I focused upon continuing to better myself as a teacher, not only with regards to curriculum and instruction, but also relationally, in nurturing student voice and honoring the uniqueness of each child within our classroom community. Moreover, I desired to serve as a teacher-leader at my school site and in the larger community in the area of K-12 public education as a Filipino American teacher.

Yet, what compelled me to begin my doctoral journey was being told by a school principal, "Don't think, Eleonor. The [textbook] publishers have already done that for

you. Just follow the teacher's guides." According to the principal, the curriculum was "researched-based," and thus the teachers were expected to follow the scripts word-for-word. I, however, asked a number of questions. Who did the research? What is the research based upon? Did these publishers know my students' academic needs and socio-cultural backgrounds better than me, their classroom teacher? Living in the era of No Child Left Behind, I was being told to be a non-thinker. How could I ask my students to engage in critical thinking and dialogue if I was being asked not to do so as their teacher? Finding myself silenced, I knew that my education journey needed to transcend these proscriptive legislative and administrative limitations. I believe that students in our preK-12 public schools deserve better and much more.

Given the opportunity to speak once again, as a Filipino American doctoral student and graduate instructor for my department's education foundations course, I found myself wondering about the lived experiences of other Filipino American preK-12 teachers. Such pondering was triggered by the fact I found that my racial, ethnic, and cultural self was not only a significant part of my lived experiences as an elementary school teacher, but also within my graduate classrooms as a student and in the undergraduate education policy studies classes I taught.

When embarking on this phenomenological journey, I asked the question: What are the lived experiences of Filipino American teachers? Moreover, what does it mean to *be* a Filipino American teacher? My aim was to ask Filipino American teachers to break the silence of their existence, particularly as current studies on Asian American teachers lack an unveiling of the uniqueness of the lifeworlds of Filipino American teachers. From my conversations with and through the reflective writings of the eight Filipino American

teachers in this hermeneutic phenomenological study, one of the most salient renderings to emerge is that race matters. Furthermore, the racial, ethnic, and cultural identities of Filipino American teachers are poignant aspects of their lived experiences within our nation's preK-12 classrooms and public schools.

The notion that race matters in teaching is not new. For example, Gershenson, Hart, Lindsay and Papageorge (2017) found that the presence of Black teachers in North Carolina public schools had a positive impact on Black students. According to the report, there was a 29% decrease in the risk of Black students dropping out when at least one of their teachers was Black when the children were between the third and fifth grade. In addition, a 39% decrease in the dropout risk was identified for Black, low-income males as well, while an increase was cited in the likelihood of Black students going on to institutions of higher education. Griffin and Tackie (2016) write that Black teachers felt they connected more easily with Black students because of perceptions of sharing similar experiences and culture. Furthermore, according to Griffin (2018), Latino teachers felt they created an environment within classrooms that welcomed Latino students as the teachers sought to honor the culture of Latino children through the inclusion of their culture and native language within the curriculum.

Yet, the saliency of race for Filipino American teachers can be seen in the distinct lived experiences of the Filipino American teachers in this study. For example, they reveal how Filipino American teachers are misunderstood, seen as outsiders within their homeland of America because of their corporal being. Moreover, they reflect upon culturally living in the space *in-between* – being a Filipino and an American, navigating between traditional Filipino culture and western, American values. These readily

conflicting values have an impact on their being in the classroom and among their educational colleagues, as Filipino American teachers share how being silent and not “making waves” in the workplace reflects their cultural rearing. Furthermore, the colonial legacy of the Philippines led to the loss of familial heritage languages, often within one generation, for which native, English-speaking Filipino American teachers in the study often experience critique.

According to van Manen (1997), phenomenological research begins and ends with lived experience. Experience as lived is that which is immediate, natural and temporal, a being in-the-moment that precedes the “reflective consciousness” (p. 35) of thought. Moreover, it involves an awareness that is reflexive, one that belongs to the self, yet in the immediacy of lived experience there is no awareness of self. Thus, lived experience stands in contrast to experience, as the latter is “actual observation,” whereby “observation [is] the source of knowledge” (Online Etymology Dictionary). Observation, therefore, finds itself in the process of thought.

Furthermore, experience distinguishes itself from lived experience as meaning for the former is viewed within the oneness of a particular whole. Lived experience, on the other hand, through its interpretive hermeneutic process, renders structures of meaning as it uncovers phenomenological themes. Van Manen writes that phenomenological themes: “...are more like knots in the webs of our experiences, around which certain lived experiences are spun and thus lived through meaningful wholes. Themes are the stars that make up the universes of meaning we live through” (p. 90). Moreover, exploring lived experience does not involve thematic objectification or generalizations.

Therefore, the essential themes rendered in Chapter Four represent my engagement in hermeneutic phenomenology's pedagogic, self-reflective research orientation towards theme. It is through thematic interpretation that a deeper understanding is unveiled, a process which encompasses hermeneutic creativity and in which linguistic transformations are composed. The aim of linguistic transformation is to write with a phenomenological sensitivity as one captures statements of theme – writing and rewriting is thus an art form. Therefore, my engagement in the interpretive hermeneutic process abounds in linguistic transformations, as I captured the essence of explicated themes while drawing from such artistic sources as poetry and literature, and from the conversations with and the reflective writing by the study's participants.

As this phenomenological journey continues, I move forward, considering in Chapter Five what the revelations brought forth by my participants and I can mean beyond the pages of this study – a further opening-up of the possibilities. It is time for the unsilenced voices of Filipino American teachers to speak to pedagogical insights, renderings that could foster “critical pedagogical competence” (van Manen, 1997, p. 8) within educators. Van Manen (1997) writes that such competence encompasses having the knowledge to act with tact, care, and in uplifting, thoughtful ways when a teacher is in a situation that is pedagogic. In my Filipino American identity is this human science research endeavor, unconcealing pedagogic significance is the way forward.

**CHAPTER 5:
REVEALING PEDAGOGICAL INSIGHTS:
THE FILIPINO AMERICAN TEACHER WITHIN –
A VOICE EMERGING OUTWARD**

You are the books you read,
the films you watch, the music you
listen to, the people you meet, the
dreams you have, the conversations
you engage in. You are what you
take from these. You are the sound
of the ocean, the breath of fresh air,
the brightest light and the darkest
corner. You are a collective of every
experience you have had in your
life. So drown yourself in a sea of
knowledge and existence. Let the
words run through your veins and
let the colours fill your mind.
(Vanek, 2009)

At this moment, as I embark upon the final chapter of this study, I find myself reflecting upon the phenomenological journey I chose to traverse as a Filipino American teacher. My first steps forward asked of me to look mindfully back, a calling for me to return within Chapter One to my own lived experiences as a preK-12 Filipino American teacher in my hometown of San Diego. Poet Sara Teasdale (1907/1984) writes: “Places I love come back to me like music, Hush me and heal me” (p. 47). Those acts of remembering were melodically vivid for me. I re-called the playful and poignant moments I spent learning with and from my students, their families, and my urban school colleagues, as if those interactions took place only yesterday.

Entrepreneurial designer Vanek (n.d.) writes: “You are a collective of every experience you have had in your life.” Indeed, who *I am* as a Filipino American teacher today, is grounded upon my lived experiences in the classrooms, on the playgrounds, and in the neighborhoods of the preK-12 schools where I have served. Those places and

spaces have been “a sea of knowledge and existence” for me as a Filipino American teacher.

Yet, this phenomenological study was not a journey I traveled alone. My exploration of the question: **What are the lived experiences of Filipino American teachers in preK-12 public schools in the United States?** called for engaging in conversations in multiple ways. In Chapter Two, I interacted with texts that aimed to speak quantitatively and qualitatively about Asian Americans in preK-12 teaching in the U.S. Such existing studies, however, neither gave voice to the distinct experiences of Filipino American teachers, nor were their lived experiences brought forth in a phenomenological key. My philosophical framing in Chapter Three, was grounded upon the phenomenological works of Heidegger, Gadamer and van Manen.

The conversations in Chapter Four, with eight Filipino American preK-12 teachers, represented the seeing of a new horizon of understanding for me. I entered this study with my own perspective as to what it means to be a Filipino American teacher. For example, in particular classrooms, some of my students of Latino and African American descent saw me as an “other,” a Filipino American teacher who was racially and ethnically “out of place.” What, however, did the voices of other Filipino American teachers say? What did my one-on-one and group dialogues with the teachers in the study reveal about their lifeworlds?

Vanek (n.d.) writes: “You are...the conversations you engage in. You are what you take from these.” In the dialectical moments with my fellow Filipino American participants, I “[l]et [their] words run through [my] veins and let the colours [of their lived experiences] fill [my] mind.” Thus, by genuinely opening myself to the voices of

other Filipino American teachers, my understanding of what it means to be a preK-12 Filipino American teacher in the United States, broadened. There are three distinctive pedagogical insights about *Being* a Filipino American teacher that are revealed in these conversations: Being Seen; Living In-Between the Tension; and Seeking a Pathway Forward. I now bring forth the trio of these essences in Chapter Five.

Sightlines

I continued [to] look at my reflection.
 I studied it for hours and gazed into the waters.
 After staring at my lonely reflection, I noticed a very bright circle in the waters.
 It was golden and shining like gold.
 Was it just my imagination?
 I often meditated on my pleasant memories of the sunny days.
 Many times I imagined that the sun was accompanying me.
 Was it my imagination this time?
 Could my greatest hopes be true?
 I reached for the bright gold circle in front of me.
 Hoping to return with all the joy in the world.
 (Whispers, 2007)

When in motion, water is a physically dynamic, change-making force. Moreover, when at rest, water can be a crystal-clear mirror upon which to gaze and reflect upon oneself – an entity which could perhaps stir a change from within. The poet Chrystal Whispers (2007) reminds us how the “very bright circle in the waters” is a reflecting pool from which one can draw perspective. Moreover, it is a lens through which the horizons of the past can be re-claimed, and those of the future can be reached for, inspiring one to extend towards “the bright gold circle in front of [you]” and to lay claim to the hope and joy that is yet to come. But first, one must come to the water and sit awhile. Such is what this phenomenological study represents – a call for Filipino American teachers to come to the water’s edge, to pause mindfully and to gaze upon their own reflections. What do they *see*? What do their mirrors reveal?

Being seen emerged as one essence of being a Filipino American teacher. The notion of a sightline is that of “any lines of sight” (Dictionary.com) between those that are watching, as individuals in an audience, and the person(s) or event that is being viewed within a particular venue, such as on a stage or in a stadium. What are the sightlines encountered by Filipino American teachers when they are “on stage” in their classrooms?

According to Levin (1988), “When ‘vision’ takes place, a *Gestalt* makes an appearance: there (*da*), in the clearing (*Lichtung*) for that place of our being (*Sein*)” (p. 9). Yet, “Vision...is not only a biological program; it is also an existential capacity, a potentiality-for-being” (Levin, p. 11). Thus, to be envisioned as a Filipino American teacher is to reflect both an existence, or *DaSein*, and the potential of such a being towards the “...‘practice of the self’ ” (Levin, p. 21). Wherein, there is a sense of limitless possibilities.

To *see* a Filipino American teacher is to embrace her existence, her presence in the classroom. As Ramos dwells within the space of her high school, she reflects: “We’re [Filipino American teachers] here...there’s a presence here.”

Where the mind doesn’t fear its own existence
Where the heart doesn’t fear its own pace
Where I don’t fear my own 'Presence.'
(Kurian, 2014)

In her poem “HOME,” Kurian (2014) exudes a sense of peace regarding her Being. She reflects upon being able to exist in mind and move in heart within a certain space without fear or doubt. Moreover, she is embracing her true self, her presence. And in this place, she is home. For Ramos, being present, in place, as a teacher in her high school classroom, is to be existentially at home.

Mirroring Existence

For Ramos, being seen as a Filipino American teacher also involves her envisioning what she, within her *self* practice as a Filipino American teacher, can potentially inspire when among the students around her. In her teaching practice, she believes: "...when I'm here in the classroom, I'm able to say [to Filipino American students]...There's all these opportunities out there that you can pursue and you can do." It is her hope that through her classroom existence as a teacher, Filipino American students can see that there are limitless professional possibilities, beyond what Ramos cites as "...stereotypical Filipino jobs" like nursing or engineering.

Ramos suggests that when she is *seen*, the Filipino American students in her midst may consider themselves to be looking into a mirror.

When you look in the mirror
Do you see only yourself?
Could the reflection be your soul,
Staring [you] in the face?
If there is a crack in the mirror,
Is that not a reflection of you?
The mirror reveals merely what your eyes
Want us to see
But could not a clearer reflection
Mirror infinity?
(Linc Stallings, n.d.)

The mirror image of the Filipino American teacher the students see readily reflects a corporeal and cultural resonance. Such a view of and from a mirror, is that which the poet Lee Linc Stallings (n.d.) lyricizes: "Could the reflection be your soul, Staring [you] in the face?" Thus, it is a seeing that is metaphysical, one that begins with the bodily self, and then looks deeper into one's inner Being.

As her Filipino American students look into the mirror of their Filipino American teacher, Ramos asks them to reflect inwardly, to look upon their own selves and consider: Who do *you* want *to be*? As Linc Stallings (n.d.) writes, "...could not a clearer reflection...Mirror infinity?" – such an infinite mirror may enable one to glimpse the possibility of future horizons. Therefore, the mirror of a Filipino American teacher is the reflection of both an existence and a sense of movement, a dynamic presence that stirs one from within. Perhaps this racial and cultural mirror, that of *Being* a Filipino American teacher, may serve as a way for some of Ramos' Filipino American students to feel professionally at home and see themselves genuinely existing one day within a preK-12 classroom as a teacher as well.

Reflecting Numbers

We are concerned that these tests do not always assess all of what it is that make each of you special and unique. The people who create these tests and score them do not know each of you– the way your teachers do, the way I hope to, and certainly not the way your families do. They do not know that many of you speak two languages. They do not know that you can play a musical instrument or that you can dance or paint a picture. They do not know that your friends count on you to be there for them or that your laughter can brighten the dreariest day. They do not know that you write poetry or songs, play or participate in sports, wonder about the future, or that sometimes you take care of your little brother or sister after school... the scores you get will tell you something, but they will not tell you everything.

(Author unknown, 2013)

The words above are said to have been written in a letter to elementary school students by their principal when the children were to receive their state's standardized test scores. As a former urban school teacher, I remember the pressure I felt every spring when my students and I entered the annual statewide testing window. Moreover, I taught and grew up in school communities that were labelled as "low performing," based solely upon the results of standardized tests. Being a public school teacher in the era of No

Child Left Behind, I was seen as being directly accountable for how my students performed on the exams. Furthermore, teachers and children were existing within an educational culture of taking tests (Valli et al., 2008), whereby knowing a child was readily reduced to quantitative measures. For example, elementary school reading specialist Heather Nichols expressed: “I don’t always know them [students] by face; I know them by data” (Valli et al., 2008, p. 23). This stands in sharp contrast to the depth that a teacher can know a child, as written by the school principal above.

Filipino American teachers in this study shared how they feel *unseen* by non-Filipino administrators and teachers when Filipino American students at their schools are academically high-performing, particularly when measured by standardized test scores. Carmen reflects about her site: “...the Filipino test scores...they hold the school up...I know there’s some troubled Filipino students...that need help, but there are no resources for it.”

nothing is quite as painful as invisible is.
walking through the crowded hallways of a dysfunctional high school
not a part of the stories unfolding around you,
simply invisible.
(Rayonna99, 2014)

In her piece *Being Invisible*, the poet Rayonna99 lyricizes about “not [being] a part of the stories unfolding around you” within her high school. Her lament reflects Narciso’s longing for his colleagues *to see* the Filipino American students at their campus who are not academically succeeding. He seems to feel a sense of loss as these young people are evidently invisible due to data citing that over 67% of Filipino students at his site are meeting or exceeding English Language Arts/Literacy standards on the state standardized test (Education Data Partnership, CAASPP, 2018). Moreover, Narciso desires to engage in dialogue with his school’s administrators and other teachers

regarding the Filipino American students that *he sees* struggling, and whose stories of difficulty apparently remain unacknowledged. He wonders, "...can we have this conversation...Is there institutional support" at his site for such a dialogue?

On the other hand, the presence of a Filipino American teacher is seemingly duly noted when the standardized test scores inexplicably drop. Rosalie recalls: "We [the teachers] just did some data analysis with the [state]...test scores," comparing data between two school years. The information cited that exam scores among Filipino and other Asian students had declined. "And of course, someone pointed this out," said Rosalie. She was then directly asked by non-Filipino American colleagues: "What's going on with *your* community? They're falling behind." In that moment, Rosalie was not invisible as a Filipino American teacher. Instead, she was critically seen as being a reflection of the fallen test scores of the Filipino American students at her middle school. She, like the Asian American students at her site, found herself visually reduced to being a set of numbers.

Filipino American teachers reveal a sense of internal tension regarding their existence when they are viewed by others on their campuses through the lens of Filipino American students standardize test scores. When looking upon still water, the glassy, mirror-like surface may leave one feeling a sense of natural tranquility. Yet, what one is truly witnessing is *tension* – the phenomenon of surface tension. Although the surface of the water may appear serene, it masks what is happening below: the kinetic energy flow of hydrogen and oxygen molecules bumping into one another. As Filipino American teachers may conceal from others this culturally-tenuous, inner-colliding, such reflects the second essence of *Being* in that lifeworld: *living in-between tension*.

Living In-Between the Tension

A Philippines Department of Tourism book touts the slogan that the nation is “Where Asia Wears a Smile” (Department of Tourism Philippines, 1976). Moreover, former First Lady of the Philippines, Imelda Marcos, stated: “Beautiful products can only be made by happy people” (n.d.). Wanting to be seen as a perpetually happy and smiling people are notions that were taught to me growing up as a Filipino American daughter. In my family, any conflict and stress were concealed under a veneer that “all is well.”

Moreover, Margie, a Filipina American young woman in the documentary *Silent Sacrifices: Voices of the Filipino American Family* (Heras, 2001), reflects upon how in her family no one wants to engage in difficult conversations. She shares:

What am I most proud of about the Filipino culture?...it was community and that familial feeling, but at the same time there’s a contradiction because we can make ourselves appear to be...a tight community. But look at all the problems that are underneath the surface...it’s kind of [a] hypocrisy...we’re so proud...we’re all tight and...everybody’s your aunt and uncle...they’ll help you. But when it comes to feeling and hurting and suffering, I’ve found that people are quick to turn their heads...they don’t want to go deeper into the root of the problem...whatever’s a quick fix, that it’ll make it look better.

Dialogue regarding personal and family struggles was avoided. The aim was to simply “make it look better” and “appear to be” well from the outside. Thus, the rather deceptively smooth surface tension of Filipino familial water, reflects a sense of calm and togetherness, while hiding the colliding forces and unrest below, impacting the body of the family.

Living in such cultural tension, associated with traditional Filipino notions of respect, always “wearing a smile,” and avoiding conversations regarding struggle and stress, was revealed within the professional lifeworld of Filipino American teachers in this study. This tension existed in-between the Filipino culture in which they were

traditionally reared, and the western, American values taught within formal schooling and lived out amidst the U.S. communities they call home. As previously discussed, Ramos brought forth how she sees herself as being culturally in-between – an existence reflecting her Being as a daughter of Filipino immigrant parents in America.

The cultural tension uncovered also resides between different generations of Filipino American teachers, and in this study, namely among the first and second generation. For instance, language can be one area of generational contention. Maverick was not taught to speak Tagalog by her parents, as they, similar to many immigrant Filipino American parents, felt that proficiency in English and speaking without a Filipino accent were vital to their children's success in the United States. Such is a perspective that reflects a Philippine colonial heritage characterized by cultural and linguistic loss. American-founded and run schools in the Philippines systematically sought to eradicate native Philippine languages and indigenous culture and identity, while promulgating the view of White American cultural and racial superiority.

Moreover, Maverick shared how she was looked down upon by other Filipinos, particularly by those of the first generation, for not being able to speak her parents' native tongue. In spite of the fact that Maverick is solely proficient in English, being seen as a Filipino by non-Filipino teachers led to her being asked to support the instruction of immigrant students from the Philippines who were English language learners. According to Maverick:

...some [Filipino] kids...were not very fluent in English, but they were really fluent in Tagalog...they would talk to me...I'd call my mom. "I have this kid that needs to know how to do...How do I say that?" And...she would...say it to me as easily as possible...I'd try to...practice it and...jot it down so I could say it again...the next day I would bring it to class and try to communicate with that...child.

This colonial heritage could also be said to have fostered traditional Filipino notions of deferring to those in authority (Enriquez, 1979), remaining silent and not questioning or challenging any entity perceived of being of higher status or in a leadership position. Carmen and Rosalie share that in staff meetings they may choose not to speak up or question the status quo, as they were traditionally raised not to do so. They reflect upon how they were taught to not “complain” and to say “yes” to those who are authoritatively above them. In contrast, Carmen observes how her White and African American colleagues speak up when they have concerns. Moreover, Narciso wrestles with outwardly claiming his Filipino American identity and drawing attention to the academic needs of certain Filipino American students at his high school. He is aware that standardized test data cite that the population most in need of learning support are students of African American and Latino descent.

Puncturing the Surface: A Question of Respect

The bonds associated with surface tension are strong enough for some objects to float upon or “walk on water,” including leaves and insects. In such instances, the cohesive surface is impenetrable. Yet, if a certain amount of pressure is applied, whereby the water’s surface is punctured, the object will sink, thus finding itself swallowed-up within the forces existing below.

In the case of Filipinos, inter-generational cultural tension and pressure are readily prominent with regards to the notion of respect. For example, a first-generation, veteran Filipino American teacher told a younger Filipino American teacher, “Liza³⁶, I will always be right because I am older than you.” Carmen, a teacher in this study, explains:

³⁶ Pseudonym

“...coming from a Filipino background...you’re taught to respect your elders...to be obedient, be quiet.” Moreover, Monzon (2010), a second-generation Filipino American who grew up in the United States, was educated in American schools, and is an education researcher and university instructor writes: “...my [verbal] directness was often times misunderstood by first generation Filipinos who perceived me as being rude and disrespectful. As a result, I’ve encountered many instances of tension, miscommunication and conflict” (p. 173).

As a second-generation Filipina American, I have found that the Filipino cultural tradition of respecting the point of view and wishes of elders, even if such is contrary to yours, could reflect a possible challenge for aspiring and beginning Filipino American teachers seeking mentor relationships with first-generation, veteran Filipino teachers. For example, the cultural perception of supposedly “talking back” to an elder could potentially make it difficult for a beginning Filipino American teacher to feel safe to express her perspective openly.

Carmen shares what she observed in a local high school Filipino language class being taught by a first-generation, Filipino American teacher: “The...teacher was [expecting]...listen to me and...don’t do anything until I tell you to do something.” Carmen’s former middle school students’ experiences seemed to echo what she saw, as some of them expressed to her:

...the Filipino language teacher at the high school...“doesn’t even let us speak and we’re supposed to practice the language, but she tells us to be quiet all the time”...in a way, they [the students] lost enthusiasm for learning the language...that demand for utmost silence...deters the kids from learning and...does not help in building the rapport between that native-born Filipino teacher and his or her students.

Carmen further reflects: “Filipino American teachers like myself...tend to be a little bit more flexible...not...a hardcore disciplinarian...like...teachers...who were born and brought up in the Philippines. I notice that they have a top-down authority kind of [way].”

As a second-generation Filipina American, Carmen understands that she is expected to show reverence towards first generation Filipino elders, even within a western, professional setting. Yet, in her role as president of a local Filipino American educators association, Carmen unexpectedly experienced an altered sense of respect. She reflects:

I did notice...I would get a lot of respect...the fact that I was...president of this local organization...it was kind of...a nice feeling knowing that you were looked up to, and even...the Filipino teachers that were older than you...were asking you for help.

The Latin origin of respect, or *respectus*, is the ‘act of looking back (or often) at one’ (Online Etymology Dictionary). As a Filipino American teacher-leader within the Filipino American community, Carmen was evidently seen differently, particularly by elder Filipinos. In spite of Carmen being younger in age and of the second generation, her position as president seemingly placed her in a position of authority, a role to which older, veteran Filipino American teachers readily looked to for help and support. Monzon (2010) writes:

Being second generation and president of a Filipino organization...I discovered that it can increase one’s status in the Filipino sociocultural hierarchy, particularly when it comes to communicating with the first generation...as I was referred to as “Mr. President” I was all of [a] sudden someone to be respected. (p.178)

Thus, being a younger Filipino American teacher in the Filipino American community can mean experiencing a cultural relationship change with regards to an elder, first-generation Filipino American teacher when the former is in a leadership position.

Being in the Tension

What is the potential impact Filipino American teachers' experience living in this tension between two sets of distinctive cultural values? One aspect could be that mentor relationships between first and second generation Filipino American teachers may be less likely, thereby resulting in a loss of classroom knowledge and experience being passed down from a Filipino American veteran teacher to a novice one. Secondly, first-generation Filipino American teachers may unintentionally cause Filipino American students to feel that the former's classroom environment is not a nurturing place to learn Filipino language and culture. This creates a disconnect in that the students readily seek to connect to their ancestral homeland through such middle and high school courses.

Being a Filipino American teacher can therefore mean trying to walk on water culturally, respecting differing values systems, balancing in-between, knowing that to puncture the water's surface means to fall in and be swallowed-up by highly-charged forces existing below. For example, I was asked to speak at a high school with a large Filipino American student population, by a group of first-generation Filipino American teachers who wanted to recognize a newly-arrived superintendent. Prior to my remarks, a Filipino American language teacher stated that Filipinos do not readily vocalize their needs well, and thus, she felt that the superintendent could do that better on their behalf. As I walked to the podium, those words were rather unsettling to me. During my remarks

I stated, “I respectfully disagree with Dr. Silva,³⁷ as our community’s work in the successful passage of the AB 420, the Filipino Language Law, demonstrates to me that Filipino Americans can successfully advocate and speak for themselves.” Months later, I learned that some of the first-generation Filipino American teachers were upset with me for publicly disagreeing with Dr. Silva and supposedly “disrespecting her.”

One may think that this cultural tension will soon dissipate with subsequent generations. Yet, in the case of the Filipino community in the United States, such lived experiences for Filipino American teachers may be ongoing for some time in light of the continuing increase in Filipino immigrant families. For example, according to the Pew Research Center (2017), San Diego was home to 196,000 Filipinos in 2015. Moreover, a 2018 Migration Policy Institute report stated that 101,000 immigrants from the Philippines reside in the San Diego region. In addition, nationally, “Filipinos are much more likely to be naturalized U.S. citizens than immigrants overall. In 2016, 70 percent of Filipinos were naturalized citizens, compared to 49 percent of the total foreign-born population” (Zong & Batalova, 2018).

When I asked a teacher in the study if the traditional cultural values she experienced as a child within her family would be different for her and her third-generation daughter, Carmen reflects:

...having [my] mom be the disciplinarian in my family, I would sometimes say to myself, I’m going to bring up my children in a more modern way. I’m going to be more understanding and have them make their own decisions. But here I am, the mother of a 5- year-old, and I’m realizing I am using the same kind of disciplinary approach that my mom is using...but that’s the only kind of discipline I know.

³⁷ Pseudonym

Thus, the external, surface existence of Filipino American teachers may continue to appear serene for generations to come. Yet, what is concealed is the bodily colliding that occurs just below the smooth, thin veneer of cultural tension. A lifeworld exists wherein the present and the near future horizons require balancing and living culturally in-between.

The Pathway Forward

When we walk, we're not walking alone. Our parents and ancestors are always walking with us. They're present in every cell of our bodies. So each step that brings us healing and happiness also brings healing and happiness to our parents and ancestors. Every mindful step has the power to transform us and all our ancestors within us, including our animal, plant and mineral ancestors. We don't walk for ourselves alone. When we walk, we walk for our family and for the whole world.
(Nhat Hanh, 2015, p. 83)

In his piece *We Don't Walk Alone*, Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh (2015) captures a notion within traditional Asian culture of perpetual ancestral and familial interconnectedness and collectivity. No matter how old a Filipino American child becomes, s/he does “not [walk] alone” (p. 86). On the one hand, a child can feel a sense of care and comfort knowing her life's journey is not solitary. Yet, it also means for a Filipino American daughter or son that one's professional and personal pathways are viewed as being a direct representation and extension of the family. Thus, as children of Filipino parents, we do not “walk for ourselves alone. When we walk, we walk for our family” (p. 86).

Furthermore, as we are reared to internalize culturally that we will always represent our family outside the home, a Filipino American child perpetually walks in

front of and “for the whole world” (p. 86) as well. Thus, we are taught to not shame the family name by making so-called “bad” life choices, as defined by elders. Ramos

reflects:

...in Filipino culture, there’s that idea of...shame...it’s always there...it’s a major thing ...where you can’t shame, you shouldn’t shame your family, you shouldn’t shame...your neighborhood...it’s so restrictive...you don’t have freedom...because whatever you may do may be perceived by someone as bad.

Moreover, Coletrane shares that his father angrily called him when the latter saw a local news story regarding narcotics and alcohol at Coletrane’s middle school: “What the hell’s going on at your school? There are all kinds of drugs happening. What kind of school are you teaching at?” Coletrane explains: “He [his father] felt...an embarrassment...because now his friends might tell him, “Hey, doesn’t your son teach at [Bay View] and there’s a lot of drugs there?” To directly address his parents’ additional concerns of potential embarrassment regarding their son being a teacher, Coletrane would show them his teacher performance evaluations:

Since my parents didn’t want me to embarrass them in some way. I show[ed] them my evaluations. I show[ed] them these little certificates that I [got]. As a Filipino American teacher, you want to make sure to show...them [you’re] doing a good job...that you’re successful.”

Yet, at the close of this study, what does it mean for a Filipino American teacher to walk forward? What pathway may lay ahead toward an even deeper sense of happiness being a teacher, and for healing from such potential lived experiences as cultural surface tension? As the traditional Filipino American culture is a collective way of being, the path for Filipino American teachers reflects a collaborative journey as well. A Filipino American teacher said to me, “There is no ‘I’ in the Filipino family. It is always ‘we.’”

How can this collective existence be part of the onward walk for Filipino American teachers?

It is this aim, to find a pathway forward, that emerged as a third essence of *Being* a Filipino American teacher. For example, how can being a Filipino American teacher be seen authentically within a teacher's school, family and the larger Filipino community? Moreover, are there ways possibly to lessen the cultural tension that can be encountered by Filipino American teachers?

In the Spirit of *Bayanihan*

There is a traditional cultural notion in the Philippines called *bayanihan*, that reflects a community coming together to help a family as the latter moves their *bahay kubo* home to another location (The Mixed Culture, 2018). This dwelling, usually constructed of bamboo and nipa leaves, is physically carried on poles by family and friends. This is an act of community cooperation and unity, a collective “heavy lifting” of a home when a neighbor is in need.

This ancestral spirit of *bayanihan* seems to mirror what the members in a Filipino American educators' association can do and *be* for one another. Carmen was introduced to a local Filipino American educators' association by her Filipina American mentor. The organization's membership is comprised of persons in preK-12 schools and faculty and staff members in institutions of higher education. Thus, the association's name and focus of support is inclusive of “educators” in their different roles, and not limited to those who serve as teachers.

According to Carmen, the association was a supportive place to *be* a Filipino American teacher. She explains:

I was able to get a lot of support there because then I met a lot of teachers that are Filipino like me and I've seen them doing a lot of good things in their community and...schools. Some of them were counselors. Some of them were vice principals. Some of them were college professors...there are a lot of...educational mentors here that I could...get... advice from...and learn from.

Carmen's mentor, Maria³⁸, was a Filipino language and Spanish teacher. According to Carmen, "I was...inspired by [Maria's] way of how to motivate the [Filipino] kids...she really got them to do civic-minded stuff...like...Filipino...cultural dances and learn...the history...I wanted to emulate her...she was an inspiration for me." Their relationship reflects a potential horizon for first and second-generation Filipino American teachers. Mentorship can transcend the cultural tension that is readily experienced between the generations.

In addition to serving as a space where she felt affirmed and embraced as a Filipino American teacher, the educators' association became a place where Carmen developed leadership skills. At different times, she served as the organization's recording secretary and also its historian. Then years later, with the encouragement and support of her Filipina American school site mentor and her mentor's husband, a Filipino American vice principal, Carmen ran for and was elected president of the organization. During her presidential tenure, she was part of the leadership team that planned, organized and oversaw a statewide conference for Filipino American educators. In addition, she helped first generation, veteran Filipino language teachers by writing letters of support on their behalf to local school districts, as the long-time teachers were facing possible termination in light of No Child Left Behind mandates. This issue of meeting "highly qualified"

³⁸ Pseudonym

status was later legislatively addressed through the passage of California Assembly 420, which I discussed in Chapter One.

Gail, as a member of a Filipino American educators' association in her local community, traveled to the Philippines. Participating in the program I previously described, she had the opportunity to see and teach in public schools in different provinces (e.g. states) within the country. Moreover, she engaged in conversations with school site administrators regarding curriculum and instruction, enabling her to gain a first-account understanding of the lived experiences of Filipino teachers and students within the context of their homeland. According to Gail:

...it [the trip] definitely was life-changing... the first thing that strikes you is the level of... resources as far as structures...[they] are not the same as in America. I came back [to the U.S.] so thankful for concrete. That you actually can stand on something that's not wet...soggy and muddy...Also, they had many students in one classroom waiting for teachers...yet they were happy to be in school...they were there to learn.

Gaining such a transformative perspective can potentially help a Filipino American teacher to empathize with and see more fully a Filipino immigrant teacher or student existing within a formal school setting in the United States. America may be dramatically different, culturally and socially, from their country of origin.

Being in the Filipino American educators' association, reflects Carmen, "...makes me feel empowered...[I] felt good and confident...It's a nice feeling that you know we're [Filipino American teachers are] all doing it for our community, for our culture." In such a space, Filipino American teachers are lifting one another up. The 1300 origin of lift is 'to raise from the ground...pick up...set in place' (Online Etymology Dictionary). The organization *sees* how racial, ethnic and cultural identity are a part of the lived experiences of being a Filipino American teacher. Moreover, when Filipino American

teachers recognize a colleague in need, they come together and walk collectively forward in the spirit of *bayanihan*, picking that person up and helping to carry her to the professional space and place she desires to be.

Other Filipino Americans Also Leading the Way

Narciso serves as the faculty representative for an afterschool program for Filipino American students at his high school. In this role, he is not in charge of the meetings. Leading the gatherings are Filipino American students from a local university with a program that is both academic and social in nature. In addition, the students from the university serve as tutors with homework, and the high school and college students engage in dialogue together regarding the cultural expectations and pressures that Filipino American young people may experience at home within the traditional culture of their Filipino parents.

This afterschool program reflects a gathering of Filipino Americans within an educational community, a time of dwelling together in which a unified sense of cultural kinship can foster a sense of owning and embracing the uniqueness of being a Filipino American in U.S. formal schooling. The Old English origin of community is *gemaenscipe*, meaning ‘fellowship, union...common ownership’ (Online Etymology Dictionary). The students collectively own that time, as Narciso enables such a union to take place. “I...have to be there,” he says. He recognizes that his presence allows Filipino American students the opportunity to engage in conversations and interactions that are meaningful to them.

Moreover, the program’s potential for a future horizon of Filipino American teachers does not go unnoticed by Narciso:

...sometimes you'll hear...that this service work...gives them [Filipino American students] a concrete way of actually imagining something that they might choose in their future...I think it helps those college students to imagine...being...a[n] educator...like I can do this...I can serve in this way. I can hold space in this way. I can...engage students in these conversations...which I think is really meaningful.

In spite of the fact that there is no ongoing gathering at the campus for himself and his fellow Filipino American teachers to engage in thoughtful dialogue regarding their existence at the high school, Narciso works to ensure that this particular Filipino American student community space continues to be in place.

During our first conversation, Narciso shared that he recently attended a Saturday gathering at his high school that was initiated by a Filipino American from the local community, and co-coordinated by members of the Filipino American student organization on campus. The event, in honor of Filipino American History Month, included traditional cultural dance performances and multiple presentations based upon students' areas of interest. Included was a panel comprised of Filipino American professionals who spoke about their experiences in the fields of business, education and the military. This undertaking represented another Filipino community-led effort.

Narciso reflects that at such Filipino American gatherings at his campus "...you stay." He explains: "I think I'm looking ...at the experiences of Filipino American students...empowering them... educating them, helping them build a stronger sense of their identity academically or culturally." Furthermore, it was a racially and culturally validating moment for the teacher. For the presence of Filipinos on the campus was visibly acknowledged and recognized, as among the school staff in attendance included the site principal. Narciso explains with a sense of hope: "...our principal was there. He gave a little welcome address, so I think there's...support...that kind of openness." In

that moment, Narciso could publicly *be* a Filipino American teacher – embracing his Filipino American identity, his “Filipinoness.”

Lying, thinking
 Last night
 How to find my soul a home
 Where water is not thirsty
 And bread loaf is not stone
 I came up with one thing
 And I don't believe I'm wrong
 That nobody,
 But nobody
 Can make it out here alone.
 (Angelou, 1975)

Being a Filipino American teacher who is walking forward, Narciso's efforts on behalf of Filipino American students echo thoughts expressed in the first stanza of Maya Angelou's poem, *Alone* (1975): “That nobody, [b]ut nobody [c]an make it out here alone.” This notion embodies the *bayanihan* spirit, representing a reaching back to an ancestral way as Filipino American teachers walk with their Filipino American community towards the horizon ahead.

Yet, Narciso wonders what will be the way forward at his campus, as the separateness between himself and the majority of the other Filipino American teachers at his school site continues. To move beyond the absence of such a cultural, collegial dialogue, he seeks to connect with other Filipino American educators in the larger community. For example, during our first conversation he shared that he attended a conference at a local university. There he conversed with Filipino American professors who are working towards developing curriculum for preK-12 schools on Filipino American history. In that space, Narciso networked with educators who share a common

curricular vision. As a result, he is more hopeful about being able to bring Filipino American history and literature into his high school English classes.

Voicing Outward and Speaking On

Place your hands to the earth in honor of its support and love and its first peoples.
Hands together in front of the forehead in honor of yourself, your practice, and all the ways it supports you in your life.
Hands in front of the lips in honor of each other, those we love, all who make it possible to be here, and the teachers and the ancestors.
And hands in front of the heart, in honor of all beings everywhere.
(Simpkins, 2018)

At the close of my Friday yoga practice, my yogi speaks aloud these words. When I asked her about the origin of the passage, she explained to me that the message is her adaptation of Buddhist teaching, which she referred to as Wise Thoughts, Wise Speech, and Wise Heart. This Buddhism-inspired passage asks one purposely to place one's hands in front of powerful actors: the mind (intellectual), mouth (corporeal) and heart (emotional). What and how we think, say and feel can profoundly impact ourselves and the lives of other beings in our world. At the same time, the mantra asks that we recognize the life journey we travel is a communal one, whereby earthly creatures and persons, including the teachers in our lives, walk with us and support us along the way.

According to Swiss psychologist Carl Jung (n.d.): "Your vision will become clear only when you can look into your own heart. Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakens." Thus, as I reflect upon my journey as a Filipino American preK-12 teacher, graduate instructor in my doctoral program, and a student of phenomenology, I awaken to how my lived experiences, including those of being a child of Filipino immigrants, have fostered a depth of care and wisdom in thought, word and heart as both a learner and teacher. For example, as I now am a university teacher education instructor, the learning within my classrooms includes critical conversations and

reflections regarding research, theory and instructional practices of language and literacy. In addition, the teaching and learning are inclusive of the needs of children from diverse sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds, and students with special needs within preK-12 classrooms. It is a higher education learning community that reflects *who I am* and from the horizons I have come as a Filipino American teacher.

Harkening Filipino American Teachers

A significant part of my growth has also been fostered by this dissertation journey. Asking the question of what it means to be a Filipino American teacher caused me not to only think about my own lived experiences, but it additionally enabled me to further develop a higher level of listening that harkens – calling upon and hearing the voices of other Filipino American teachers. Heidegger (1927/1962) writes:

It is on the basis of this potentiality for hearing, which is existentially primary, that anything like *hearkening* [Hörchen] becomes possible. Harkening is phenomenally still more primordial than what is defined ‘in the first instance’ as “hearing” in psychology – the sensing of tones and the perception of sounds. Harkening too has the kind of Being of the hearing that understands. (p. 207)

According to Levin (1989), hearkening “requires the disciplined practice of *Gelassenheit*, i.e. letting-go and letting-be...listening without getting entangled in the ego’s stories and preoccupations...a different way of channeling, focusing, attending” (p. 48). Moreover, hearkening is spiritually distinctive, as what begins as *Gelassenheit* “gradually performs an ontological recollection, a recollection of the utterly open dimensionality of the auditory field, as which the sonorous Being of beings manifest for our (properly) listening ears” (p. 48). Thus, to listen deeply is to harken the inner most being of another. Moreover, to engage in listening that harkens is to gather with others and to be of a mindset that is open to the limitless possibilities and dimensions of difference. In

addition, it is a hearing that is attuned to listening for the structures of meaning that sonorous Beings can bring to a gathering.

Don't just listen.
 Feel.
 Because the answers don't always come
 In loud preachings and audible words.
 Sometimes they come
 In the dark of the night
 Brought by the silent whispers
 Or the cold midnight breeze.
 Sometimes your heart hears
 More than your ears do.
 (Aragon, 2015)

The Filipina poet Aragon (2015) in *Hear With Your Heart* writes that discernment and understanding with another may come through “silent whispers.” Moreover, she poetizes that to truly hear someone, one must feel and listen with one’s heart, reflecting an effort to make an empathetic connection. During the study’s group conversation, Narciso expresses to our circle of Filipino American teachers: “It’s interesting to hear...these...validating stories” of one another’s existence as Filipino American teachers. Prior to our dialogues, no one had ever asked them what it means to be a Filipino American teacher.

Asking a question does more than fill open space.
 It expresses curiosity.
 Devolving into things not easily expressed.
 Given our availability.
 It expresses a deeper need for connection.
 Whether we are open to what we desire most.
 Closed off to preference.
 The right time of day or night we can de-clutter.
 Taking in what we give out.

Asking a question isn't something done out of boredom.
 Or merely because [you're] there.
 It expresses a thought that requires action.
 That I've thought of you.
 That there is a desire laid bare.
 An anticipation that builds until the next time
 I am able to hear your voice.
 For the more serious moments require a deeper tone.
 An ear that senses deeper need.
 Responding to this deep need of connection.
 A need of care.
 A need of longing.
 To respond to this vulnerability not out of responsibility.
 But in the openness of being
 (Wadley, 2018)

The poet Wadley (2018) reminds us that asking a question is purposeful, as it "...does more than fill open space... It expresses a deeper need for connection... That I've thought of you... I am able to hear your voice... A need of care. A need of longing... in the openness of being." This study has been a heartfelt journey of thought-full asking and care-full listening, one which began with asking the question: What does it mean to be a Filipino American teacher?

What followed included conversations that invoked tears among the study's participants, as we reflected upon moments of great meaning within our lifeworld as teachers. For example, a number of us shared how we chose to live out our inner calling to become teachers in spite of discouragement from family and friends. In addition, there were tender moments when we heard Filipino American teachers reveal how their parents were not able to live out their homeland professional lives as teachers in America, as the latter's teaching degrees earned in the Philippines were not honored in the United States. Furthermore, what also emerged is how Filipino American teachers find themselves misunderstood by their students and families, as they encounter the question: What are

you doing in the classroom, *being* a teacher? Thus, when harkened to, these Filipino American teachers spoke outward.

Another Beginning

Beyond what pedagogical insights have been revealed, this study represents not an end to the conversation about what it means to be a Filipino American teacher, but an opening to further dialogue about that lifeworld. This phenomenological exploration can serve as an opportunity to continue speaking about this distinctive existence. For instance, it potentially can be a way for conversations to begin within Filipino American families and the larger Filipino American community regarding how to encourage and support persons who aspire to become teachers.

In addition, first and next generation teachers may come together to address the cultural tension that readily precludes mentor relationships from forming. Parks Daloz (2012) writes: "...we human beings thrive best when we grow in the presence of those who have gone before. Our roots may not follow every available pathway, but we are able to become more fully ourselves because of the presence of others. 'I am who I am because of who we are,' goes the saying, and mentors are a vital part of the often invisible mat of our lives" (p. xiii). Should intergenerational Filipino American teachers find a way forward together, the possibilities to thrive, professionally and personally, within a mentor relationship can be transformative. According to Carmen:

I learned from [my mentor's] life experiences what to do and not what to do in the teaching profession...I will always remember her giving nature...I will be eternally grateful for the pearls of wisdom she has given me in teaching and how to enjoy life to the fullest.

Moreover, continuing conversations might foster a more inclusive dialogue within teacher education programs (TEP) about Filipino American teacher experiences within

TEP curriculum. Endo (2015) writes in her study of eleven Asian American teachers: “Through their pre-service preparation to their professional careers,” they “had to navigate...‘culture[s] of Whiteness’...the invisible but salient reality that White cultures, experiences, and identities permeate educational structures from the curriculum, instructional practices, and within everyday interactions” (p. 610). Hearing the voices of Filipino American teachers within teacher education curriculum can help to open up or further extend the Asian American experience in teaching. Levin (1989) writes:

...not being *heard* by others diminishes our capacity to hear ourselves, and may sometimes so *deprive* us of the possibility of listening to ourselves that it even becomes difficult for us to know our real needs and concerns: in sum, to know ourselves and form an authentic personal or collective identity. (p. 106)

Thus, a curriculum that more inclusively hears the lived experiences of Filipino American teachers can potentially enable a greater understanding of “...the real needs and concerns” (Levin, 1989, p. 106) of Filipino American teachers. Moreover, such listening could possibly foster a deeper sense of self among aspiring Filipino American teachers as well.

As the Filipino American teachers in this study mindfully reflected upon their sense of identity regarding what it means to be a Filipino American teacher, their dialogic and written engagement also serve to add to the broader exploration of teacher identity, particularly within teacher education programs. Jenlink (2014) writes:

At the heart of teaching is a fundamental question of who we are, both as a person and as a teacher, which revolves uneasily around the notion of a self...The question of who we are is a question of identity, a question of what it means to be a teacher in the particular social, cultural, historical, and political contexts in which schools are situated, in this particular moment in time. (p. 247)

By asking teacher candidates to reflect upon and engage with the question of “Who am I?”, aspiring teachers may bring into focus their “inner eyes” (Jenlink, 2014, p. xix).

According to Jenlink, by examining our inner eyes we unconceal our biases – the individual perspectives one holds and which are shaped by a person’s values, beliefs and ideologies. Thus, by bringing readily hidden personal views to the forefront of one’s consciousness, what may have been previously invisible to teacher candidates themselves could then be recognized.

It is through such identity recognition that future teachers might more fully see who they are, which influences who they *will be* in the classroom. Jenlink writes that when teachers are visible to themselves, their students are no longer invisible. Thus, seeing and embracing students in the totality of their being begins with a teacher seeing her whole self. Furthermore, what could enrich such identity exploration by teacher candidates is the curricular inclusion of the voices of persons often less heard within colleges of education, including those of the lived experiences of Filipino American teachers.

What has been revealed in this phenomenological exploration of the lived experiences of Filipino American teachers may also inspire administrators at school sites to engage thoughtfully with teachers of Filipino descent in ways that may have not been previously considered. Superintendent of the Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland, Joshua Starr (2018), states: “The loudest voices don’t always represent the majority. It’s essential for school leaders to listen to everyone, including those who aren’t so easily heard” (p. 38). Moreover, “...school leaders need to listen to those people who choose to speak up. But those can’t be the only voices that matter... We must find ways to hear what they [the often silent ones] have to say” (p. 39). Listening to and hearing Filipino American teachers may call for gatherings outside of traditional faculty

meetings. In addition, surveying Filipino American teachers could possibly enable them to share their concerns more comfortably. For according to Starr, “System and school leaders...can certainly do more” (p. 39).

What began as a phenomenological conversation among a gathering of Filipino American teachers, represents a human science dialogue that seeks for others to join the journey. Van Manen (1997) writes: “...phenomenological human science...must animate and live in the human being who dialogues with the text...texts which invite dialogue with those who interact with it” (p. 21). In addition, such research aims to foster human progress, as characterized by “...humanizing human life and humanizing human institutions to help human beings to become increasingly thoughtful...better prepared to act tactfully in situations” (p. 21). Teacher education and education administrator programs are two arenas that may further humanize their curricula and training through thoughtful consideration and inclusion of the lived experiences of Filipino American teachers.

Therefore, as this study brings forth the lifeworld of Filipino American teachers, the rendering of their essence within preK-12 education may also serve to humanize their existence further within primary and secondary classrooms. Overall, this exploration reveals that Filipino American teachers have racial, cultural, linguistic and historical lived experiences that are distinctive from other teachers of color, including in relation to other Asian and Pacific Islander Americans. Moreover, asking Filipino American teachers to speak aloud unveils that their presence in U.S. public schools has yet to be fully recognized and heard. Korean American novelist Hak Kyung Cha (1982/2001) writes:

It murmurs inside. It murmurs. Inside is the pain of speech the pain to say. Larger still. Greater than is the pain not to say. To not say. Says nothing against the pain to speak. It festers inside. The wound, liquid, dust. Must break. (p. 3)

She describes a great pain that can come when not saying aloud what is in one's mind and heart. Moreover, as these inner "murmurs" (p. 3) can fester internally, they may manifest into a sense of woundedness. Thus, Hak Kyung Cha calls for breaking this debilitating silence.

The shattering of this cultural silence also reflects Strobel's (2001) notion of decolonization. As previously discussed in Chapter Three, the Philippines endured racial and cultural subjugation at the hands of Spain for over three hundred years and then for nearly a half-century under American colonialism. Strobel writes that the colonial silence that fell over the Filipino people resulted from this prolonged occupation. Moreover, she believes this silence can be broken through decolonization, a process that enables Filipinos to heal and love themselves once again. Furthermore, decolonization fosters an identity whereby Filipinos see themselves as persons of worth – deserving of being thought and written about, and of learning and telling the truth.

This hermeneutic phenomenological study, through its breaking the silence of Filipino American teachers, reflects decolonization. The Filipino American teachers in this study stated at the onset of their participation that this was the first time they were asked what it means to be a Filipino American teacher. By first thoughtfully asking and then mindfully listening to their lived experiences, the existence of preK-12 Filipino American teachers in U.S. public schools is embraced as knowledge and an understanding worthy of academic research.

In addition, through this study and future research endeavors, Filipino American teachers and the Filipino American community as a whole may further break the “consequences” (Strobel, 2001, p. 50) of colonial silencing. For example, by doing so, those who work with Filipino American children and youth, including Filipino American teachers, may seek to address truthfully and work collectively to prevent acts of suicide that continue to be carried out by Filipino American young people. According to a faculty member I spoke with, who is employed by the largest community college district in a region of southern California and an education institution with a large Filipino American student population, Filipino American student suicide has increased. For instance, during a recent school year, three suicides occurred. Incidents of suicide and suicide ideation are not readily discussed within the Filipino American community because of the sense of shame it brings to bear upon Filipino American families. Moreover, such cultural silence can also be compounded by religious doctrine as the vast majority of Filipino Americans are Catholic, the religion of Spanish colonial rule.

Furthermore, by Filipinos and non-Filipinos continuing to speak beyond the pages of this study, the silence broken by these Filipino American teachers may lead to a more thoughtful, wholehearted and tactful embrace of the Filipino American teacher *within*, and of the Filipino American teachers *existing* among us.

Salutations to the eternal teacher
 Who exists within us as pure being,
 pure awareness, pure joy
 Who is peaceful, luminous, without form
 Who is never not supporting us
 (Author unknown, n.d.)

This yoga salutation reflects Gail’s thoughts on *Being* a teacher: “[It] is the feeling of confidence, satisfaction and joy,” to “...finally *know* to your core, this is what I’m

suppose[d] to do... a true sense of peace and calm take over.” According to Levin (1988): “The *Dasein*, the human being, is that being, the only being, for whom to be is an open question” (p. 25). Gail further writes, “I came about this career almost through a journey...I’m not one of those people who said I’ve always wanted to become a teacher. I think the teaching, *becoming* a teacher came out of great...searching.”

The personal and professional odyssey which Gail undertook led to her “pure being,” revealing the “eternal teacher” that she *is*. The Latin origin of eternal, or *aeternus*, means that which is ‘enduring...everlasting.’ Moreover, the Middle English usage has included, “...things or conditions...with a beginning only but no end” (Online Etymology Dictionary). Her quest is reflective of this study’s journey, a quest towards unveiling what it means *to be* a Filipino American teacher. The research undertaking of this moment is at its close, yet, may we heed the hermeneutic phenomenological call to further explore and engage with Filipino American teachers in their lifeworlds. To reach the end is to make a beginning.

APPENDIX A: LETTER OF INVITATION

Dear Participant:

Thank you for your interest in being a part of my research study. This study will explore the professional and personal experiences of Filipino American teachers. The research process will involve Filipino American teachers who are willing to participate in a set of activities over a period of about four months, taking approximately eight hours. The activities are as follows:

- Participate in an initial audiotaped conversation with me, for approximately one to two hours, on your experiences as a Filipino American teacher.
- Engage in a written, reflective assignment, based on our conversation.
- Participate in a second audiotaped conversation with me, for approximately one to two hours, in the continued examination of your experiences as a Filipino American teacher.
- Engage in a second, written reflective assigned, based on our second conversation.
- Lastly, participate in a group conversation with me and other study participants, for approximately one to two hours, in order to reflect on major themes that grew out of conversations with members of the group.

To the extent possible, protecting your privacy, confidentiality, and identity are important to me. As part of the research process, all of the conversations will be audiotaped, transcribed, and forwarded to you to verify content and intent. Finally, your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are under no obligation to participate and you can end your participation at any time without penalty. You may also decline to answer any question I ask during our conversation.

If the above is agreeable to you, you will be asked to sign and date a Consent Form at our first meeting. By signing this form, you are agreeing to participate in this research project. I look forward to working with you. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at eleonor.castillo@gmail.com or (619) 417-2892.

Sincerely,

Eleonor G. Castillo
Ph.D. Candidate
University of Maryland

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

Consent Form

Date

1 of 3

Project Title	Searching for Reflections: The Lived Experiences of Filipino American Teachers
Purpose of the Study	This research is being conducted by Eleonor G. Castillo at the University of Maryland, College Park, under the direction of Dr. Francine Hultgren. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you have identified yourself as a Filipino American teacher working in a U.S. public school. The purpose of this research project is to explore the experiences of Filipino American teachers working in United States public schools.
Procedures	<p>The procedures involve the following steps over a period of several months.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. You will be asked to have two, one-on-one conversations with Eleonor Castillo about your teaching experiences. These two conversations will take about three to five hours total. 2. You will be asked to write reflections about your teaching experiences. These written reflections will take approximately two hours. 3. You may be asked to add to your responses at a later date to clarify something for me. If needed, this follow-up will take about one hour. 4. You will be asked to participate in a group conversation with Eleonor Castillo and all of the study participants. This group conversation will take approximately one to two hours. 5. You will be asked if you agree or do not agree to be audio-taped during the study. 6. To help protect your confidentiality, you will choose a pseudonym that will be used during the study. Your real name will only be known by the researcher and will not be used on any written or recorded information. 7. All recordings, written material, and transcripts from the study will be kept secure for five years and then deleted and destroyed. <p>We encourage you to ask us questions throughout the duration of the study.</p>
Potential Risks and Discomforts	There may be some risks from participating in this research study. It may be emotionally uncomfortable to relive some of your teaching experiences.

Potential Benefits	This research is not designed to benefit you directly, but the results may help you gain a richer understanding of your professional experiences as a Filipino American teacher. We hope that in the future other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of the challenges and rewards of being a Filipino American teacher.
Confidentiality	<p>Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized.</p> <p>To help protect your confidentiality:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. You will choose a pseudonym that we will use when we talk about and record your teaching experiences. 2. Only I will know your real name, and I will not use it to identify you in any written or recorded information. 3. All recordings of our conversations, written reminiscences you share with me, and transcripts of our conversations will be kept in a locked file cabinet at my home and on a password protected computer. <p>The secured data will be kept by the researcher for five years. Afterwards, audio files and written reflections will be deleted and destroyed by shredding.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I agree to be audio-taped during the study. <input type="checkbox"/> I do not agree to be audio-taped during the study.</p> <p>If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.</p>
Medical Treatment	The University of Maryland does not provide any medical, hospitalization or other insurance for participants in this research study, nor will the University of Maryland provide any medical treatment or compensation for any injury sustained as a result of participation in this research study, except as required by law.
Right to Withdraw and Questions	<p>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.</p> <p>If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact: Eleonor G. Castillo</p>

	<p>977 Raedel Drive San Diego, CA 92154 (619) 417-2892 eleonor.castillo@gmail.com</p> <p>Dr. Francine Hultgren Teaching, Learning, Policy and Leadership Department 2311 Benjamin Building University of Maryland (301) 405-3324 fh@umd.edu</p>	
Participant Rights	<p>If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">University of Maryland College Park Institutional Review Board Office 1204 Marie Mount Hall College Park, Maryland, 20742 E-mail: irb@umd.edu Telephone: 301-405-0678</p> <p>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</p>	
Statement of Consent	<p>Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.</p> <p>If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.</p>	
Signature and Date	NAME OF SUBJECT [Please Print]	
	SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT	
	DATE	

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