

Educational Needs of Filipino Immigrant Students

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Filipino immigrant students are the largest group served by the Hawaii State Department of Education's program for Speakers of Limited English Proficiency (SLEP). Data from the 1989-90 school year showed that 42% of the 8,879 students enrolled in the SLEP program were Filipinos, most of whom were newcomers to Hawaii (Hawaii State DOE, 1990). According to the 1990 census, the State, a port of entry into the United States, receives more than 8,000 immigrants a year (Glauberman, 1991). Among those who move to Hawaii, Filipinos comprise the largest single ethnic group. Immigration patterns seem to indicate that this trend will continue for years to come.

Teachers of Filipino immigrant students have identified problems that seem unique to these youngsters. These problems persist and predictably involve the areas of language learning, motivation and classroom interaction. These problem areas affect the students' performance in school and their sense of social competence. Eventually, for many, these problems lead to low academic achievement. This article is written for educators who are working with or are interested in knowing and understanding Filipino immigrant students. By describing and highlighting some key areas of difficulties that Filipino immigrant students experience, the authors hope to assist teachers gain insights into the nature of their problems in school. Furthermore, because many of these difficulties are related to problems of communication and interpersonal relations in the classroom, the authors believe that teachers will recognize similar struggles experienced and expressed by students from other ethnolinguistic minority groups. Understanding this population therefore may help teachers plan instruction more effectively for other minority groups as well. This is so because students who come from homes that are not representative of a western middle class environment also have difficulties relating to the school's cultural norms and conventions in spite of their ability to speak the language used in the schools.

From the perspective of immigrant Filipinos, the difficulties in school begin immediately after they become students in Hawaii due to dissimilarities between the two educational systems. The types of problems the youngsters encounter

initially are not caused by language difficulties. American English, after all, is not exactly "foreign" to Filipinos. They are and have been exposed to it while still in the Philippines. So although there may be a distinct accent and perhaps a hesitation to engage in dialogue due to inhibitions, Filipinos generally can understand enough to follow a conversation in English. A more significant hurdle for these youngsters is the major shifts they have to make, language being only one of them. This is further made more difficult in that often they are not themselves aware of this need to shift and, even if they were, they are unable to do anything about the changes to be made. For the immigrant Filipino student, the complex web of interrelated problems inherent in having to adjust can be grouped into two major categories: one relates to systemic differences that are more overt and technical, most of which can be resolved within a relatively short period of time; and the other relates to a more intangible and less explicit set of factors that have to do with socio-cultural characteristics about which information and knowledge alone will not bring fast and easy understanding.

System Differences

One set of problems relate to differences between the school systems of the Philippines and Hawaii. These differences require some adjustments in thinking and attitudinal changes on the part of the immigrants. Knowledge and understanding on the part of the receiving schools' personnel would help minimize the trauma of the transition.

Of varying significance are different arrangements in the school's organizational structure regarding grade placement, school year calendar, class and lunch schedules. Provisions for field trips or school-sponsored camping trips, graduation and registration requirements, frequency and types of progress reports are other activities, and school-related functions that are structured differently and which difference may explain some of the disorientation students experience in their first few months. An amplification of each will be useful.

Grade Placement

In the Philippines, schooling generally begins at age seven. When Filipino children of that age arrive in Hawaii, they are usually assigned to one grade level above where they are supposed to be. Skipping a grade because of one's age and not because of one's ability or readiness compounds the learning difficulty encountered by these children. Moreover, they are understandably overwhelmed by how much they are supposed to know already. Their counterparts

in Hawaii, although only in the second grade, have most likely had two to three years of schooling experience since children in Hawaii attend nursery and kindergarten schools. Therefore, the immigrant seven year old Filipino child lacks considerable experience relative to the rest of his/her classmates. In some instances, this gap is even wider. Some Filipino parents withdraw their children from school when the family receives approval to immigrate. However, the actual departure could take from one to two years. Meanwhile, the students are out of school.

Students at the end of their senior year have a different kind of problem. Elementary and secondary education in the Philippines is divided into six and four years. A high school graduate therefore is only sixteen years of age. When a sixteen year old high school graduate from the Philippines immigrates to Hawaii, he or she is unqualified to attend college. Often students expect either to go to college or to secure a full time job soon after they arrive. Disappointment and frustration are what they encounter instead. So the school has to deal with a reluctant junior or senior student. Hopefully, the unhappy situation does not last.

School Calendar

The school year in the Philippines begins in June and ends in March. April and May are summer vacation months. May is a special month because this is when flowers are in bloom, and summer fruits are in season and in abundance. At this time, immigrant students, not surprisingly, feel nostalgic and, although other reasons may be given for an early leave from school, these would be the preferred months to visit the Philippines. This request for leaving school before the year is completed becomes a source of frustration and irritation to local teachers. The teachers have generally interpreted this as an indication of the Filipinos' low regard for the value of education, and some attribute it to evidence of the Filipinos' lack of ambition.

Daily School Schedule

Most of Hawaii's Filipino immigrant students come from provinces where the school day begins at 7:30 in the morning and ends at 4:30 in the afternoon. In addition to studying the required curriculum, students are expected to stay after school to participate in cleaning the classrooms or to assist in school beautification projects. In urban Manila, where facilities are inadequate to accommodate the large numbers of students, some schools offer a separate morning and afternoon schedule of classes. Known as "double-single" sessions,

one set of students attend school from 6:30 to 12:00 noon and another from 12:00 noon to 5:30 p.m. These are large classes, each enrolling up to 40 students. The restrictions inherent in large classes and the long day for many, may explain why some students feel comfortable being reactive rather than proactive. This behavior in the Philippine context reinforces one of the important values in the socialization of children who are "to be seen, not heard." In Hawaii, this behavior is interpreted as passive and though it is not disruptive, this behavior is not valued nor is it rewarded. Sometimes, it is interpreted as a characteristic of people who lack ambition and drive.

Lunch Arrangements/Meals

Schools in the Philippines, especially in the rural areas, do not have cafeterias. There is ample time to go home since an hour and a half to two hours are allotted for lunch breaks. Students from distant barrios bring their home packed meal and join friends under the cool shade for the noon hours. In the cities, food concessions line the street alongside the campus grounds. Owned by private individuals, these small, portable fast food places are popular with older students who opt to buy lunch. In Hawaii no one is allowed to leave the school grounds without permission. Besides, there would not be enough time unless one skipped the first period after lunch.

Newly arrived Filipino students have to cultivate a taste for milk and raw vegetables which are served almost daily as part of the school lunch program. In Philippine style cuisine, vegetables are seasoned in various ways and always cooked. Milk is expensive, so the immigrant is not used to drinking it at home either. Consequently, they tend to avoid these items altogether.

It should be noted that these differences may seem inconsequential to most adults but, for children who have to cope with daily discomfort while trying to gain acceptance, these seemingly minor hurdles mean more than moments of unease. They can lead to feelings of strangeness and a sense of alienation which if ignored will very likely lead to other problems.

Field Trips

Public schools in the Philippines do not fund field trips. Overnight camping is not even an option. Field trips or "excursions" are solely family coordinated activities. Staying overnight in camps is an imported concept that remains foreign. Outings of students usually include older family members or friends who are known or "connected" with someone else in some way. This is

especially true with all teenage outings. Thus, when schools in Hawaii send notices home for these types of activities requiring parental permission, the initial response tends to be negative. It becomes one more aggravation in the home and school relations.

Registration Requirements

Seven different kinds of medical reports are necessary for completing Hawaii's school registration. These requirements are often overwhelming for newly arrived parents who need to register their children in the new school. Consequently, their children's school registration is often times delayed because of non-compliance with any one of these requirements. The medical reports as required by the State Department of Health (DOE, 1987) include the following:

1. Examination by a licensed physician within 12 months before entering school;
2. Certification of absence of active tuberculosis as determined by a tuberculin skin test or chest x-ray within 12 months before entering school;
3. Immunizations against: a) diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis (DPT), b) measles, c) mumps, d) poliomyelitis, e) rubella.

Because enrollment is not contingent upon such medical requirements in the Philippines, immigrant parents either fail to grasp the significance of the requirement or are intimidated into inaction. The consequence of not following through on the items creates further delays in registration.

Frequency and Type of Student Progress Reports

Report cards in the public schools in the Philippines are issued at the end of the school year for elementary grades and six times a year in the high schools. At both levels, final grades are computed either in a cumulative or averaging system. In the cumulative system, a student can make up the assignments/grades during the latter part of the year as the last grade at the end of the grading period is considered the final grade. In the averaging system, the student's six grades are averaged to become the final score.

In the Philippines, elementary and secondary grades are reported in specific percentage scores. A score of 75% is the cutoff mark separating a passing from a failing grade. So any score 75% and above means "pass," and any score 74% or below means "fail." Many Filipino parents in Hawaii are confused when their

children receive a letter grade of "S" (satisfactory) or "U" (unsatisfactory) and do not consider those as appropriate marks because of their lack of precision.

The problems generated by these differences, however, are transitional and, in time, the youngsters generally do become familiar with the rules and requirements. The process of adapting to the new context is made even easier if parents are informed or instructed about these differences. However, differences that generate problems that are more directly related to classroom participation and performance are complicated and critical as ultimately their long term effects may impact on decisions affecting life choices.

The following section will discuss another set of difficulties teachers have identified that directly affect students' performance and self-presentation in class.

Socio-Cultural Differences

School achievement requires the mastery of a complex web of interrelated skills. In the case of students who transfer from one school system to another, there are two levels of competencies that must be learned simultaneously. One is the subject matter itself or content; the other, the processes through which that content is received, interpreted and understood in the "new" school environment through test-taking, recitations or presentations. The form through which these competencies are expressed go beyond the use of language. This area of competence is more broadly defined to include a communicative system that has verbal and non-verbal aspects to it. It also extends into relational aspects of classroom interaction. Taken together, these dimensions of communication and relationships are what scholars regard as factors of a socio-cultural system.

Subject matter mastery is without question the primary objective of teachers and the ultimate intended outcome of successful school learning. Mastery of their discipline field is required of all teachers, and the goals of teacher education programs are explicit in this regard. However, teachers do not just teach content in an abstract way. They do so within an environment that they think will facilitate the understanding of their subject. That environment is comprised of a mixture of individuals and resources: the learners, materials and relevant instructional methods. All these elements are coordinated in some systemic fashion designed to assist teachers maintain order and cohesion while also guiding students toward the attainment of knowledge and understanding, appreciations and skills. What helps teachers keep all these elements in some sensible

fashion is the set of "classroom protocol" that underlies the rhythm and flow of classroom interactions. Translated into rules of appropriate conduct, classroom protocol defines to some extent what is acceptable or approved, encouraged and rewarded behaviors.

Furthermore, these rules are predicated on a societal value system, and knowledge of them is assumed. They are tacit rules, unexplained and applicable to all. For example, when students have some problem or difficulty with the task, they are to approach the teacher directly. This is not necessarily generalizable. Studies done on classroom behaviors indicate that ethnic preferences enter into the manner in which students deal with this situation (Jordan, 1984; Vogt et al., 1987; Nelson-Barber and Meier, 1990). The authors believe that these rules are like parts of a cultural script that may not be known and, in some instances, may even be contradictory with other cultural scripts. Rules of conduct are culture oriented.

In the case of Filipino immigrant students, unfamiliarity with these rules affects their performance and results in misunderstandings between them and their teachers. The authors believe that in the classroom two different cultural scripts may be operating. Where they are incompatible or not known well enough to be functional, neither the teacher nor the students benefit. The latter generally bears the more serious loss of missed opportunities, for example, opportunities to display what he/she knows or a chance to practice his/her skill at speaking and interacting with others and their ideas. The authors have selected a couple of these classroom contexts in which classroom protocol dictates the acceptance of student performance to illustrate the nature of problems newcomers experience.

Classroom Protocol

Turn-taking rules. Turn-taking is a process included in an interaction pattern which refers to the manner in which students participate in class discussion. Mehan (1979) identifies three ways in which turn-taking procedures are conducted in a regular classroom recitation period. One is to call on individual students to elicit a response, and the teacher "nominates" the respondent by identifying him/her. Only the person named is expected to answer. Another way is for teachers to invite students to "bid." This means the teacher asks the students to raise their hands or indicate somehow that they want to be called upon to answer. And a third way is to cue the students to volunteer their response without having to be called on or having to be selected over someone else. Filipino immigrant students, according to the observations of Ongteco,

(1987) are more comfortable with being "nominated." The student may try to indicate non-verbally that he or she would like to respond but waits for the teacher to call. This way the responsibility of the "rightness" or "wrongness" falls on the teacher rather than on the student. From the Filipino's point of view, to be "nominated" by the teacher would be less embarrassing than to have to bid and be in error. Not being able to answer correctly when called upon is not shameful. To have volunteered only to give a wrong answer would be cause for shame and ridicule. Why risk it!

An implication of this for teachers might be for them to realize that immigrant Filipino students need to exercise options for participation in class. They need encouragement and assurances while learning to transition into a different set of rules to follow. Not volunteering to answer or not asking to be called upon are often interpreted as indifference. Sometimes, from the teacher's point of view, lack of knowledge or preparedness is implied by this lack of response. The cumulative effect leads to a most unfavorable assessment of the newcomers.

Participation in discussions. Another shift in behavior that is needed may be from one who observes to one who participates actively in discussions. Filipino students have been taught at home to "use their eyes" and to follow a "model" and "do" the tasks as described. The quiet student is a good student. In American schools in general, although quiet and order may reign supreme in the classroom, verbal ability is valued, encouraged and rewarded. Asking questions in the Philippine context is asking to challenge the authority of the teacher, whereas in the American context the adage, "how will you know if you don't ask," still holds. In fact, it matters little sometimes whether you have the answer; the value is in the asking. A display of verbal skills is necessary to show what one knows. It is one frequent form of "feedback" in classroom activities. It is very important to provide opportunities for these students to break through the barrier of silence. Even when they come to realize that talk is important, the newcomers may not feel confident about their ability to use the language, or they may be uncertain about the rules of participation. The teacher might start by having them talk about things familiar and known to them to give the students more control over the content, freeing them to concentrate on the "how" part of communicating.

A summary of potential conflicting socialization practices between Filipino home culture and the school may stimulate dialogue about ways to be more culturally responsive to the newcomers' educational needs:

Item	Home Rule	School Perspective
Interaction	Speak only when spoken to.	Volunteer responses.
	Do not ask too many questions.	Learn by discussing, asking, verbalizing.
	Listen and do as I say.	Contribute to discussions.
Learning Attitudes	Learn by observing.	Ask questions and ask for help.
	Read the book and learn from it.	Review the book. Comment and critique. Question.
Working Preference	Work with others. Help one another like you do at home with chores.	Do your own work. Do what you think is best for yourself. You alone are responsible for your actions. The sooner you're on your own, the better.
Role Perception of Teachers and School	Do as your teacher tells you. He/she is your parent in school. Teacher "knows everything."	Self-initiative is good. Teacher is facilitator of learning, not parental surrogate. Teachers are not the only source of knowledge or information.
	The school is the major source of knowledge and information.	We need parental support and help.
	The school will teach you how to make a living.	We can only do so much.

What has been presented above are only a few selected categories of instances and areas of adjustment problems that Filipino immigrant students face. The language issue, a major one, has not been included. It is not dealt with in this paper because the subject alone would take an entire chapter in itself. For readings on the issue of native language use and Philippine languages, readers are invited to read the writings of Teresita Ramos (1978) and Clifford Prator (1950).

The purpose of this paper was to present some basic information to provide educators with a knowledge base from which to consider ways to assist Filipino immigrant students adjust to a new school environment. The authors have taken the position that the schools have the responsibility through the teachers to socialize these students in the ways of the adopted society. When students leave school and are problems in the community, the school as one of the agencies responsible for the development of citizenship skills cannot conveniently turn its back on the situation. Although the school alone cannot be blamed for what goes wrong or for every individual's failure in any community, neither is it completely exempted from being accountable. The idea is not to lay blame but to invite educators to clarify their role with respect to socializing newcomers. Are they a challenge or a burden? Are they participants or outsiders?

The authors believe that the sooner the schools accept the fact that the immigrants are here to stay, are willing to become active and contributing members of the community and are trustful that the schools will help them in this process no matter how it may sometimes appear, given the difficulties encountered on both sides, the schools will work toward designing more effective and culturally responsive programs for them. However, both parties need to be informed or reminded that they have to build cultural bridges to reach a common goal—successful instruction and academically successful students who graduate.

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