

TEACHING *Filipino-American* STUDENTS

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Introduction

Do you have any Filipino-American students in your classroom? Most likely you do. Filipino Americans make up the second largest Asian ethnic group in the United States, numbering close to two million people (U.S. Census, 2000). These numbers will only continue to grow, as Filipino Americans represent the third largest group immigrating to the United States. Consequently, Filipino-American students have become a significant presence in our nation's schools. In fact, these students already comprise 18 percent of the public school system in Hawai'i, and there are more than 140,000 Filipino-American students in California.

Despite their increasing numbers, Filipino Americans remain overlooked and underserved in U.S. schools. Cordova (1983) describes them as "forgotten Asian Americans." Teachers rarely take into account the perspectives and backgrounds of Filipino Americans in their curriculum and pedagogy. A close look at their high dropout rates and low attainment of higher educational degrees in places like Hawai'i show us that the needs of Filipino-American students are not being addressed (Agbayani, 1996).

What can teachers and administrators do to reach out to and teach their Filipino-American students effectively within a multicultural context? This article offers 10 guidelines with concrete and specific examples that merge theory and practical application. These recommendations are based on my review of the literature on Filipino Americans and education. Unfortunately, while the information gleaned from this research was valuable, it was still limited.

I expanded the scope of my analysis to include both academic and non-mainstream sources on Philippine and Filipino-American history, culture, identity, and community. I synthesized this large and disparate body of work for its implications on teaching Filipino-American students. Finally, I drew on my background as a Filipina American and my years of experience as a teacher who has taught Filipino-American K-12 and college students and as a professor of education who has specialized in multicultural education in Hawai'i and the continental United States.

I have been in the field of education long enough to know that there is no single formula to follow when teaching students from a particular ethnic group. What you will read here are generalizations based on my own observations, experiences, and research as well as others' recorded understanding and studies of the cultural patterns found among Filipino Americans. By no means are the following guidelines prescriptive or meant to ste-

reotype Filipino Americans. Rather, these 10 recommendations are intended to facilitate greater understanding of the Filipino-American experience in order to better inform the teaching of these students.

1. Know your Filipino-American students.

Filipino Americans are a diverse group. Our makeup and perspectives are determined by several factors, such as our provincial/ regional roots in the Philippines, immigrant or American-born status, mixed parentage, and place of residence in the United States. The Filipino-American community even differs among the East Coast, the West Coast, and the islands of Hawai'i (Litton, 1999).

Further, there are multiple layers to the Filipino culture. It is a unique blend of east meeting west. Filipinos are influenced by their indigenous roots and Malay ancestors; the influx of Chinese, East Indian, and Arab settlers; over 300 years of Spanish domination; and a half century of U.S. rule. This wide range of influence may help explain the apparent contradictions in the Filipino culture (Ponce, 1980). For example, Filipinos are a religious people, with over 80 percent Catholics, yet many continue to hold beliefs that are outside the Christian faith.

Implications for Teaching: Take an active role in learning about the rich history, cultural backgrounds, and experiences of your Filipino-American students. Educate yourself on the diversity that exists within the Filipino-American community and the multiple layers of the students' culture.

There is so much to learn about the Filipino-American

experience, which cannot all be covered here. Begin with a few seminal books about Philippine and Filipino-American history, culture, and literature. To help you get started, I have created at the conclusion of this article a list of recommended resources that I have used with college students and teachers. I have organized them by topical subheadings. Self-education and gaining content knowledge are the first and most critical steps to understanding your students. This information will help you see how the history and culture of Filipino Americans shape the behavior of your students.

2. Connect the curriculum to your Filipino-American students.

I once interviewed a Filipina-American student from Washington State about her experiences in school. I asked her why she had never learned about Filipinos in her middle school, where Filipino Americans comprised 75 percent of the student population. She replied innocently, "I suppose it's because Filipinos haven't done anything important." Her startling response warns us that students need to see their own histories, cultures, and people who look like them in the curriculum. As Filipino-American community activist Alan Bergano (1994) states, "If your identity has no history, you do not exist." Continual exclusion from the curriculum leads to students feeling insignificant and inconsequential (Pang, 1990; Swartz, 1992; Woodson, 1933).

Implications for Teaching: Once you know and understand your students, build a curriculum that captures and captivates them. Find ways to include the significant cultural experiences, insights, and talents of your Filipino-American students into their learning. Start simple. Encourage students to share Filipino foods like *adobo* (a marinated dish with soy sauce and garlic), *pansit* (noodle dish), and *lumpia* (egg roll). Make *parols* (Filipino Christmas lanterns), dance the *tinikling* (a dance imitating the movement of a *tinikling* bird between two bamboo poles), and celebrate Filipino heroes on Jose Rizal Day (December 30) and Philippine Independence Day (June 12).

The Filipino American National Historical Society (FANHS) inaugurated October as Filipino American History Month to commemorate the landing of the first Filipino in Morro Bay, California, in 1587. Celebrate the month by highlighting the achievements of famous Filipino Americans like former Hawai'i governor Benjamin Cayetano, historians Drs. Fred and Dorothy Cordova, fashion executive and designer Josie Cruz Natori, novelist Carlos Bulosan, Miss America 2001 and teacher Angela Baroquio, and actor Lou Diamond Phillips (Cordova, 1998). Commemorate those First and Second Filipino Infantry Regiments, part of the U.S. military who liberated the Philippines from Japanese occupation during World War II (Castillo & Izon, 2002).

Although it is fine to start with famous people and what multicultural scholars describe as "foods, festivals, and folk dancing," push yourself beyond this "contributions approach" of integrating ethnic content knowledge into your curriculum (Banks, 2002). Make an effort not to "spotlight" Filipino Americans, but rather structure lessons about Filipino people, culture, and perspectives around universal concepts and themes, thus integrating them within a multicultural context (Espiritu, 2001). For example, students should learn about the concept of civil disobedience from the perspective and experiences of

diverse people like Filipino-American labor leader Larry Itliong, alongside Mexican-American labor leader César Chávez and Japanese-American college student Gordon Kiyoshi Hirabayashi, who challenged the U.S. government's evacuation and internment of about 120,000 Japanese Americans during World War II.

Incorporate relevant examples from the experiences of Filipinos in the different subject areas (Macaranas, 1995). In math word problems, substitute alien terms with familiar items such as *balikbayan* (translated as "return to country") boxes used when individuals are returning to the Philippines. Have students connect math and culture by researching mathematical practices in ancient or current indigenous groups in the Philippines (Lee-Chua, 2001). Use popular Filipino games such as *dyak-en-poy* (stone, scissors, paper) and strategy games such as *sungka* to teach logic (Almario, 1991). In language arts, fill your classroom with culturally relevant literature on Filipino Americans (Bruno & Beilke, 2000). Read Filipino ghost stories instead of only European fairytales. In science, highlight Filipino inventions such as the fluorescent light bulb, the incubator, sing-along (which later became the Karaoke machine) (Esposito, 2001), and the yo-yo as it exists today in American society (Pilapil, 1994).

In social studies, teach about the diaspora of Filipinos and the multiple experiences of being Filipino American (San Juan, 1994). In your history lessons, include the early settlements of the Filipino "Manilamen" in the Bayous of Louisiana since 1763 (Espina, 1988), the plantation era in Hawai'i (Okamura, 1996), and the formation of labor unions and strikes in California, Washington, and Alaska (Cordova, 1983). Show Filipino Americans as active contributors to U.S. history.

Be cognizant of conducting an equal and comparative study of Philippine and Filipino-American history and culture. This can serve to help bridge the experiences and relationships between Filipino immigrants and Filipino Americans, as well as Filipinos born and raised in Hawai'i.

3. Help to decolonize the mindsets of Filipino-American students and parents.

Over 350 years of Spanish and U.S. colonialism has created a "colonial mentality" in the minds of Filipinos. A colonial mentality attributes everything positive and desirable to the colonizers and reinforces the belief that the colonized peoples are psychologically and intellectually subordinate (Memmi, 1967). This attitude results in feelings of cultural inferiority, an inability to articulate ethnic identity, and a lack of ethnic pride (Strobel, 2001).

The drawing by Francisco "Corky" Flores Trinidad from Teodoro's (1991) *Out of This Struggle: The Filipinos in Hawai'i* (see Figure 1) typifies the kinds of identity issues Filipino Americans face. It is not uncommon for Filipino Americans to deny their ethnic background (Revilla, 1996).

For some local Filipinos raised in Hawai'i, their ethnic identities may also be closely tied to their parents and grandparents who immigrated to the islands as laborers. Some students may be embarrassed to be associated with this group of people, who were viewed as second-class citizens (Libarios, 2003). Furthermore, negative and demeaning stereotypes like being "gang members" inhibit a positive identity and hold Filipino-American students back from achieving their full potential



Figure 1. Cartoon by Francisco "Corky" Flores Trinidad

(Macaranas, 1995).

Implications for Teaching: Expose the existence and harmful consequences of a "colonial mentality" in the minds of Filipino-American students and parents. Begin by having students share their ethnic identity and what it means to them. Ignite student awareness, interest, and pride in their ethnic identity. Confusion and ignorance can also come from the lack of knowledge about themselves. Prevent an "empty-ethnic pride" syndrome (Espiritu, 2001) by grounding students' ethnic pride in substantial content knowledge of Filipino history, contributions, community activism, and role models. A sense of inferiority can come from the existence of negative images (even if there are only a few) as well as a lack of positive images associated with being Filipino-American. Actively counter negative stereotypes about Filipino Americans.

Encourage Filipino-American students to articulate the absence and invisibility of themselves in the school curriculum. Teach students about the roots of their colonial mentality and to question how their histories have been traditionally taught. For example, critique the colonial and biased presentation of Philippine history. Help students see that when they learn that Spain "discovered" and "civilized" the Filipinos, this negates the existence of a flourishing multicultural civilization prior to Spanish conquest.

4. Establish personal connections with your students.

Most Filipinos greatly value personal relationships and social interaction. They are known to be highly affectionate people and are often seen in groups (Libarios, 2002). It is jokingly said that whenever two *Pinoys* (a shortened term for Filipinos) or two *Pinays* (shortened term for Filipina women) get together they form a club (Cordova, 1983).

Personalism or the personal quality of their interactions shows why Filipinos would rather deal with people than institutions (Salvador, 1996). Neither strictly hierarchical nor equal, relationships between people are generally complementary:

leader-follower, teacher-pupil, or boss-worker (Ponce, 1980). Filipino Americans tend to be extremely loyal participants in this relationship.

Implications for Teaching: Getting to know your students as individuals and also as part of their ethnic cultural group is extremely important. Do "getting to know you" activities and give autobiography assignments to find out about the lives of your students. Once students feel valued and know that you care about them, they will begin to trust you. Their motivation to perform academically will come from the desire to please you as their commitment within the social hierarchy of teacher-pupil.

5. Build a *bayanihan* or spirit of community in the classroom.

Filipinos place great value on the family (Almirol, 1985). The family is so important to the Filipino culture that the 1987 Philippine Constitution recognizes the Filipino family as the foundation of the nation. Article II, Section 12 states, in relevant part: "The State recognizes the sanctity of family life and shall protect and strengthen the family as a basic autonomous social institution."

The composition of the Filipino family extends beyond the nuclear makeup to include grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, and others incorporated through religious ceremonies like baptisms and weddings (Mendez, 1974). A hierarchy exists within the Filipino family with respectful protocol (for instance, *mano* or the act of placing your forehead to the back of an elderly's hand) and terms (such as *kuya* or *tata* to precede the name of an older relative to signify respect). Filipinos do not want to shame the family or the group.

Implications for Teaching: Take advantage of the collectivist nature of Filipinos. Most Filipino-American students do well in environments that promote a sense of community (Castillo & Minamishi, 1991). Set up learning experiences that promote collaboration (Libarios, 2002). For example, use cooperative learning and jigsaw techniques (Kagan, 1994).

Students may also be motivated to succeed for the group rather than for themselves as individuals. Compare your classroom environment to this picture (Filipino artist unknown) of a group of people who must use the *bayanihan* spirit to work together to transport a *nipa* hut, a house made of bamboo and nipa leaves and built on stilts (see Figure 2). Discuss with the students how they might create this same kind of *bayanihan* spirit in their class so that they raise everyone's level of learning and academic achievement.

Most Filipino Americans do not want to stand out from their peers. Some are shy, or they may feel that this makes them appear conceited or selfish. When disciplining or reprimanding your students, instead of singling them out, capitalize on their reverence for the family or the group. Ask them to think about how their actions might negatively affect those around and close to them, especially members of their family.

6. Give voice to Filipino-American students.

Many Filipino-American students may be quiet in class and may be considered unassertive for a number of reasons. This should not be associated with being stupid or indifferent. Immigrant students might face a language barrier (Chattergy, 1991). Although English is still used as a medium of instruc-

tion in Philippine schools, students may still be in need of ESL (Macaranas, 1995). The reasons for being quiet may lie more in what is expected of Filipino students in schools in the Philippines compared with the United States. For example, students from the Philippines are accustomed to highly structured environments of direct instruction. The teacher is seen as the authority figure who talks while the students listen. The pupil's role may be quite passive (Ponce, 1980). This role, which might have worked in the Philippines, may clash with the expectations of the American teacher, who wants students to call out answers or participate in class discussions (Chattergy, 1991). For the Filipino student, it may be perceived as rude to ask questions. Students may also be self-effacing and scared to respond for fear of giving an incorrect answer or looking dumb.

However, when Filipinos are in group settings, they tend to be friendly and chatty. They engage comfortably in "simultaneous talk" where communicative behaviors overlap, showing cohesiveness and closeness rather than competitive interruption (Speicher, 1994).

Implications for Teaching: Be explicit in encouraging students to speak out in class. Give constant affirmation to student responses whether right or wrong and praise students for trying. Some Filipino-American students prefer to be "nominated" by the teacher to speak rather than volunteering their response (Ongteco, 1987).

Break the barrier of silence in stages in order not to cause discomfort. Have students individually write down their responses, and conduct pair-shares and small group work before bringing ideas to the entire class. Or have students answer questions in unison, as all boys/girls or by table grouping so that students do not feel singled out. Diversify the ethnic makeup of your cooperative groups. At times, create groups that have students of similar and different ethnic backgrounds. Provide alternative mechanisms such as artistic venues—spoken word, poetry, drawings, and dramatizations—so that students can express their thoughts freely.

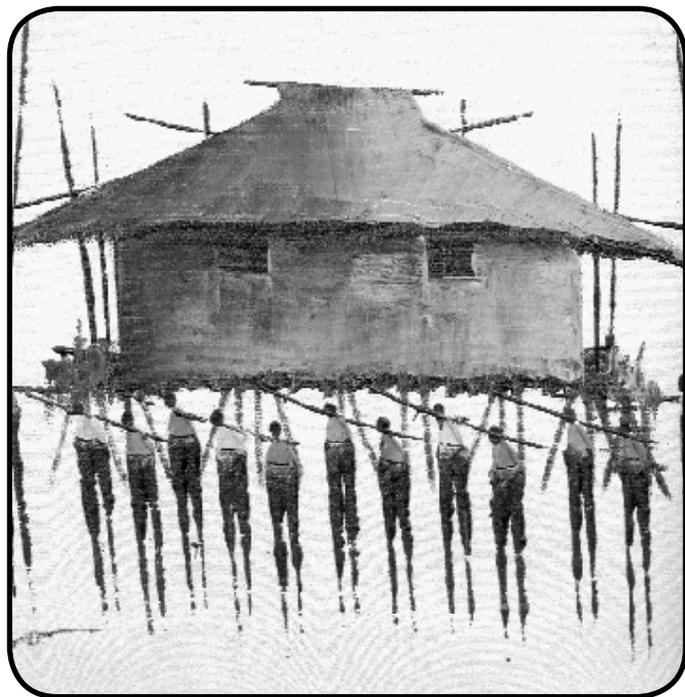


Figure 2. Nipa Hut

7. Teach Filipino-American students to speak their minds.

Filipinos tend to be indirect and often have a roundabout style of interacting to maintain harmonious relationships. They may not tell you directly if something is bothering them because most Filipino Americans are not confrontational. Because many Filipino Americans like to avoid conflict, they are more likely to say what they think the other person wants to hear (Morrison, Conaway, Borden, & Koehler, 1995). A "yes" may mean anything from "I agree" to "maybe" to "I hope you can tell from my tone that I mean no." Filipino Americans may smile or laugh at what may seem to be inappropriate times to people outside the Filipino culture. A smile may actually hide embarrassment or discord.

In addition, many Filipino Americans would much rather arrange to speak through intermediaries or spokespeople than to convey their thoughts and feelings outright to you (Salvador, 1996).

Implications for Teaching: Do not accept the answer to your question at face value. Dig deep to reach the true meaning. Probe to get to the root of the matter of what may be bothering the student. Read between the lines and pay close attention to subtle clues such as body language and tone of speech. Expect Filipino-American students to be indirect when handling problems they may have with a task. Be open to meeting your students after class or during recess to clarify instruction instead of expecting students to ask you questions during class.

Teach students that social context plays a large part in determining when it is appropriate to be passive, assertive, and aggressive. Show them the differences between being passive and aggressive and the problems associated with each (Lange & Jakubowski, 1976). Respect the Filipino style of indirectness, but also encourage students to practice being direct and assertive. Enable students to understand that there are strengths and weaknesses to these cultural patterns of being indirect.

8. Use art forms such as visual representation, dance, and music to teach and assess core subjects.

The arts play a large role in contemporary Filipino-American culture. These include chorale groups, beauty pageants, filmmaking, composing, dance, singing, the spoken word, painting, and drawing.

Many Filipinos have natural artistic talent and an eye for aesthetics. For example, some of the greatest cartoonists in the world are Filipino, such as Francisco "Corky" Flores Trinidad, the first Asian-American editorial cartoonist to be syndicated in the United States, and Alfredo Alcala, who inked *Swamp Thing* for DC Comics and *Conan the Barbarian* for Marvel Comics. Another Filipino American whose work has entered American pop culture is Ruben Aquino, a supervising animator in Disney movies such as *Lilo & Stitch*. It should come as no surprise to find out that many Filipino-American students show a preference for, but are not limited to, visual learning (Ingham, 1993; Park, 1997).

Implications for Teaching: Expand your repertoire of teaching to use visual and artistic techniques to instruct and assess students. Utilize story mapping as a precursor to writing. Use graphic organizers such as fishbone, graphs, matrix, tables, flow charts, or Venn diagrams to present information rather than

keeping to a linear or outline format. Assign projects that enable students to display their knowledge through drawings, models, dioramas, cartoons, murals, puppet shows, skits, role playing, and so on. Encourage bright and vibrant colors.

Teach students about Filipino history and culture through popular musicals like Cordova's (2003) "Heart of the Son," about the Philippine Revolution, or through murals (Gonzalves, 1998). Have students examine Eliseo Art Silva's mural entitled "Filipino Americans: A Glorious History, A Golden Legacy" located in Los Angeles or the "Pinoy Teach Mural" located on the north wall of the Filipino Community Center in Seattle, Washington.

Using the arts also allows students to express multiple interpretations of content. For example, use a traditional poetic form of debate in the Philippines called *balagtas* that uses higher order thinking skills. Like a duel of words, this poetic form is a verbal exchange between two opposing viewpoints that employs rhyme, reason, and passion (Macansantos & Macansantos, 2000).

Appeal to most Filipino Americans' attraction to song and performance by using karaoke singing to enhance reading and writing skills.

9. Involve Filipino-American parents in nontraditional ways.

Filipino-American parents have an extremely high level of respect for the school system (Litton, 1999). Parents are known to repeatedly state: "Education is the key to success." Immigrant parents place so much trust in the schools as the major source of information that they may not believe the school needs their input or help (Chattergy, 1991). School administrators and teachers may interpret this attitude as parents not caring about education, but on the contrary Filipinos greatly value education.

Implications for Teaching: Reach out to Filipino-American parents and encourage them to participate in positive and meaningful matters related to school. Personally inviting parents to become involved in school events may be more effective than sending out impersonal flyers or letters (Litton, 1999). Give parents a purpose for attending school, for instance, to serve as a guest speaker or to watch their child's musical performance.

Because most Filipino Americans enjoy social interaction, facilitate small groups of parents to discuss issues during Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) meetings. View these meetings as fulfilling a social function as well as an educational purpose. Organize a potluck to entice parents to the school meetings.

Another idea might be to have parents help schools organize a *barrio fiesta* (Filipino celebration) to symbolize the start or end of a new school year and to promote unity among students, families, and the community.

10. Provide a variety of resources and role models for students.

Traditional sources of knowledge about Filipino Americans are scarce, but you may draw on rich sources like the students' home culture, community organizations, or media sources. Some leading youth and educational community organizations are the Filipino American National Historical Society (www.fanhs-national.org), Filipino Youth Activities, Inc. ([\[pinoy.org\]\(http://pinoy.org\)\), and Search to Involve Pilipino Americans \(SIPA\) \(\[www.esipa.org\]\(http://www.esipa.org\)\). Media sources include national newspapers like the *Philippine News* and *Filipinas Magazine*, or local newspapers like Hawai'i's *Filipino Chronicle*. In addition, see examples of supplementary curriculums that focus on Philippine and Filipino-American history in the list of recommended resources.](http://www.fya-</p>
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In Hawai'i, most Filipino Americans are overrepresented in highly visible low-paying service-related positions in the tourist industry (Agbayani, 1996). They are extremely underrepresented in the teaching profession—five percent—despite the fact that Filipino Americans make up approximately 20 percent of the school population in Hawai'i. Because Filipino-American students have very few role models in high status professions, they have developed a skewed sense of their options. A group of 20 Filipino-American eighth grade students from a school in Hawai'i were asked where they thought they would end up after high school. Their responses were: "military, hotel, OCCC (Oahu Community Correctional Center), and Honolulu Community College" (Labrador, 2003). Sadly, these students know what society expects from them. They are even aware of how their school counselors channel them into low-paying jobs and community colleges rather than four-year institutions.

Implications for Teaching: Tap into all aspects of the Filipino-American community as a resource. Partner with local Filipino-American community agencies to organize a spelling bee or develop an oral history project. Invite family members to an "Evening of Story Time" at the school to encourage reading among the youth. In addition to calling on family members as resources, invite college students from local Filipino-American student clubs into your classroom to discuss the evolution of their own ethnic identity and cultural pride.

Teachers and guidance counselors need to have, and more importantly, relay high expectations of achievement and career goals to their Filipino-American students. Students themselves need also to see Filipino Americans in other fields besides the military, tourism, and the hotel industry. Students should know that they can be successful in all walks of life. Invite Filipino-American guest speakers from various professions, such as doctors, lawyers, teachers, engineers, entrepreneurs, or political leaders to discuss their culture, ethnic pride, identity, and professional successes as well as challenges in their lives. Lived experiences and resources within the Filipino-American community must be mined and validated (Strobel, 2001).

Summary

These 10 guidelines are not meant to be exhaustive. Add what strategies you think work well for the Filipino-American students in your classroom. You may ask, "Aren't these just good educational practices?" While these recommendations may seem like common sense, they are not common practice.

The guidelines are here to help you reflect on what you know about the history, culture, and sense of identity of your Filipino-American students and how you may apply this knowledge to teach them effectively. The guidelines should make you think about how you set up your classroom environment and what you do to include the voices, experiences, and learning styles of your Filipino-American students. Finally, the guidelines should push you to think about your outreach efforts to Filipino-

American parents and your search for alternative resources offered by your local Filipino-American community.

I hope these ideas will help you establish meaningful connections with your Filipino-American students. And I hope they will help you transform your curriculum and pedagogy, promoting culturally relevant teaching for the benefit of your students. 

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