Knowing Ourselves and Our Histories

What Ethnic Studies Offers Teacher Education

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Abstract

The field of teacher education is witnessing what some may characterize as an Ethnic Studies Education turn. Growing support for the movement for K–12 Ethnic Studies is revealing a necessary (re)imagining of what education can become and subsequently how and why teacher education must change. In this article, I use portraiture to share the experiences of two veteran teachers of Color. The portraits illuminate how Ethnic Studies was central for their learning to interrogate white supremacy and other forms of power. I offer implications for teacher preparation programs and teacher educators on the utility of Ethnic Studies for teacher education.

Introduction

Political activist and community leader Yuri Kochiyama's (1993) life work demands acknowledging the impact of multiracial alliances in the pursuit of collective progress. In the documentary *Yuri Kochiyama: Passion for Justice*, she stated, "Unless we know ourselves and our history . . . there is really no way that we can really have positive kinds of interaction where there is real understand-

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ing." This phrase, "knowing ourselves and our history," presents challenges and sobering realities within teacher education, especially for teachers of Color. What happens when teacher education fails to adequately support teachers' knowing of themselves and the students they serve? What happens when teacher education is hostile to the humanity of teacher of Color candidates? This moment is marked by an emboldened white supremacy and ongoing global pandemics shedding light on stark inequities evident in schools and the lives of students and teachers. At the same time, a culture war rages on with efforts to pass legislation to ban swaths of critical histories, restricting what teachers can and cannot teach and presenting major implications for teacher education.

Issues related to justice and power in teacher education are often relegated to a single multicultural education course rather than being emphasized as praxis across teacher candidates' preparation. University teacher education program commitments to social justice are increasingly visible but fall short at programmatic and curricular changes. Describing the potential for an abolitionist praxis in teacher education, Sabati and colleagues (2022) incisively wrote, "From our vantage point, the profession has been remarkably resistant to change. In this moment of accelerated visibility surrounding both state-sanctioned violence and resistance, what can teacher education programs learn?" (p. 178). Their provocations are instructive for detailing why a paradigmatic shift in teacher education is urgent and necessary. How and why the field prepares teachers to interrogate racism and the colonial roots of schooling must be of central concern for teacher education programs rather than reactionary platitudes and hollow commitments in the shadow of white supremacy (Calderon, 2014; Carter Andrews et al., 2019; de los Ríos et al., 2019; Matias, 2016; Solorzano, 2019). Teacher education must necessarily redirect its focus to examine how interlocking systems of white supremacy, settler colonialism, cis-heteropatriarchy, anti-Blackness, and carcerality are constitutive of schooling. Furthermore, the complexities of teacher education connected to the imperial logics of schooling reveal vestiges of colonialism. Cultural studies scholar E. San Juan Jr. (1996) contended, "What is tutelage but a euphemism for the self-producing apparatus of colonial discourse, conforming to the requirements of capital accumulation?" (p. 30). As the current state of teacher education endures an exodus of teachers amid a slew of states legislating and restricting curricula, a site attending to these challenges exists through Ethnic Studies.

Ethnic Studies is the interdisciplinary study of the political, social, cultural, and economic experiences of minoritized groups. It closely examines race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality to understand how such groups (comparatively and otherwise) have been affected by systems of power (Butler, 2011; Hu-DeHart, 1993; Murase, 1976). More precisely, Ethnic Studies involves three major concerns: access, relevance, and community (ARC). Tintiangco-Cubales and colleagues' (2014) formative work described the ARC of Ethnic Studies as involving *access* to a quality education for more students of Color where they receive a rigorous and *relevant* education. Ethnic Studies would bridge formal educational spaces to

community involvement, advocacy, organizing, and activism. From this context, Martha Escobar's (2014) challenge for teachers is appropriate: "Our responsibility as Ethnic Studies teachers is to struggle for our communities' liberation and life and this is not possible without first engaging in the labor of imagining the unimaginable" (p. 245). A part of this imagining begins and remains with the conviction that Ethnic Studies is teacher education.

This article draws from data examining the ways Ethnic Studies prepared teachers of Color in ways their mainstream teacher education programs did not. Through the experiences of Filipino American teachers, this study aims to document how two veteran teachers were shaped by and sustained through Ethnic Studies. Their narratives point toward ways teachers can be sustained and better prepared to teach in critical ways. The questions guiding this study were, (a) How do two veteran teachers of Color draw upon their backgrounds in Ethnic Studies? (b) How did Ethnic Studies sustain the experiences of two veteran teachers of Color? and (c) To what extent can Ethnic Studies inform teacher education? Considering the relationship between Ethnic Studies and teacher education, I turn to the experiences of two veteran Filipino American teachers with backgrounds in Ethnic Studies to identify how such a relationship is central to interrogating white supremacy and its attendant logic of power.

This article begins with a background and context for Ethnic Studies and education. I continue by describing the methodology and portraits of two veteran teachers whose backgrounds in Ethnic Studies shaped their experiences as classroom teachers. I conclude by discussing how Ethnic Studies responds to Kochiyama's call to "know ourselves and our history" and through such a knowing, the field of teacher education can move toward a "real understanding" of the circumstances students and teachers of Color face.

Background and Theoretical Framework

Ethnic Studies is arguably the only academic field that emerged for and by minoritized peoples. Ethnic Studies is the interdisciplinary study of race and systems of power through the perspectives, histories, and knowledges of minoritized people (Hu-DeHart, 1993). Lisa Marie Cacho (2010) reminds us,

> Ethnic Studies teaches students that the current level of racial tolerance is not the inevitable result of the nation's march toward racial progress, but the hard-earned product of struggle and resistance. . . . Ethnic Studies teaches intellectual skills, but it also teaches students how to use those skills to decipher (neoliberal) antiracist policies, interrogate historical narratives, analyze their own lives, and imagine possibilities for something different. (p. 33)

From this perspective, Ethnic Studies is at once a demand for a radical and community responsive education. As history teaches, such transformations are not without pushback and resistance. David Stovall (2014) cautions, "Fear rises in the

heart of the rulers at the threat of the colonized beginning to understand, critique, and oppose colonization" (p. xi). Tracy Lachica Buenavista (2016) historicizes the movement for K–12 Ethnic Studies and offers an exacting analysis of national cases in which Ethnic Studies was "misdefined" as ushering in "the new culture war in American education"' (p. vii) amid legislation for Ethnic Studies in public schools. To date, California has been leading the way with several landmark bills related to Ethnic Studies. These bills include a push for Ethnic Studies as a high school graduation requirement (Assembly Bill 123), a statewide model curriculum (Assembly Bill 114), and, in the case of the California State University—the United States' largest public education system—a course requirement (Assembly Bill 1460). The fact that such policies have made their way to the state level is indebted to the collective organizing and activism of student and community leaders. Yet, there are concurrent policies attempting to undermine these grassroots efforts (Campbell et al., 2019). These educational policy moves suggest that Ethnic Studies is a protracted struggle that even 50 years later is threatening to the status quo. Self-determination, knowledge of self and community, comparative learning histories, leadership, critical consciousness, community organizing, and self-love are among the unique experiential knowledge attributed to Ethnic Studies. How, then, might these characteristics translate into the ways we prepare, sustain, and educate future teachers? Imagine a cadre of critical teachers whose dispositions are informed by radical thought and praxis imbued through Ethnic Studies.

Literature Review

Research examining the teacher workforce has brought to the fore the "enormity of the scope of whiteness" in teacher education (Picower, 2021, p. 13). This is not to suggest, however, that teachers of Color cannot have meaningful experiences in their teacher education. As concerted efforts to erase critical histories arise, what is clear is the need for another way of doing teacher education. Although teachers of Color make up only 18% of the teacher workforce in the United States (Easton-Brooks, 2019), there is still much to be learned from the experiences of teachers of Color and, more specifically, how they can be equipped with the tools to disrupt whiteness within their teacher education program and into the profession. A growing body of research has explored the ideological perspectives teachers of Color bring, especially how they view teaching as a political act and how these perspectives push back against whiteness (Hannegan-Martinez, 2019; Navarro et al., 2020; Pham & Philip, 2020; Pour-Khorshid, 2018; Rodríguez, 2018). These studies align with Bree Picower's (2021) assertion that "when teacher education programs are structured to interrupt teachers' mainstream understanding of race, programs are positioned to go beyond just changing the lesson plans aspiring teachers might teach" (p. 167). The possibilities for Ethnic Studies within teacher education as an incisive intervention to interrupt whiteness are promising.

Scholars have explored how Ethnic Studies improves students' academic experiences and overall engagement in schools (Cabrera et al., 2014; Dee & Penner, 2017). Yet, few studies have examined Ethnic Studies in relation to Ethnic Studies teachers themselves (see Curammeng, 2020a; Sacramento, 2019; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2010). Key scholars have outlined ways the preparation of teachers and curricula can be used to interrogate the interlocking logics of power that Ethnic Studies works to dismantle (de los Ríos, 2013, 2020; Halagao, 2010; Reyes-McGovern & Buenavista, 2017; Tintiangco-Cubales & Duncan-Andrade, 2021; Valdez, 2018). Building upon these important contributions, questions remain about the extent to which Ethnic Studies can be associated with teacher preparation. Without such an understanding, we are left with an inadequate analysis of the productive ways ethnic studies can support the criticality of teachers, that is, a consciousness and development of a pedagogy within and through Ethnic Studies.

Methodology

Portraiture is a methodological approach for research that advocates for blurring empiricism with aesthetics to account for complexities, dynamism, voice, relationships, and subtleties of experience (Curammeng, 2020b; Flores, 2017; Shalaby, 2017). This study utilized portraiture to make sense of what it means for teachers to have an Ethnic Studies background. I defined this background as participants' knowledge base in Ethnic Studies acquired through university courses, community organizing, and/or grassroots activist spaces. I used portraiture because of the powerful ways it can trace the complex humanity and layers of teachers' experiences while inviting readers to "listen" for the Ethnic Studies story woven within each portrait. I share Lawrence-Lightfoot's (2016) articulation of portraiture at length as it is instructive for readers to understand and engage with the portraits that follow. She writes,

> Portraiture is within the realm of qualitative inquiry. It's a phenomenological methodology, but it is distinctive in that it is the first social scientific methodology that is explicit in blending art and science, bridging empiricism and aestheticism. It cares deeply about rigorous empirical description, but it also cares a lot about the artfulness of the doing of it and the displaying of it, the ways in which portraiture is written, composed, developed, and presented to an audience. (p. 9)

The portraitist (researcher) is very much actively engaged in piecing the aesthetic whole together; some might refer to this as analysis, although portraiture is an iterative and nonlinear methodology. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) writes,

> The self of the portraitist emerges as an instrument of inquiry, an eye on perspective taking, an ear that discerns nuances, and a voice that speaks and offers insights. As a matter of fact, the voice of the portraitist often helps us identify her or his place in the inquiry. (p. 11)

To that end, my experiences, voice, and perspectives are woven into each portrait. This study situates Filipino Americans and education against a tenuous history of colonialism (Constantino, 1970; Maramba et al., 2021). Taken together, this methodology encourages thinking across disciplines, informing how we might better comprehend and recognize Ethnic Studies' potential in teacher education.

Data Sources and Analysis

The portraits in this article come from a larger study that explored the ways Ethnic Studies shaped Filipino American teachers' experiences as classroom teachers. I utilized purposive sampling (Merriam, 2009) to select eight teachers for this study. Teacher participants worked in large public schools in California. I selected teachers based on criteria that included their self-identified knowledge with Ethnic Studies and the ways they came to learn Ethnic Studies. For instance, some teachers shared that they gained knowledge of Ethnic Studies primarily through college-level courses in either Ethnic Studies, Asian American Studies, or Women and Gender Studies. Others attributed their background in Ethnic Studies to learnings within community organizing spaces both locally and transnationally. These criteria honored the interdisciplinary aspects of Ethnic Studies while also acknowledging the multiple sites of learning where political identities and critical teacher development coexist (Kohli et al., 2015; Martinez et al., 2016). Teachers participated in two semistructured interviews and focus groups. Interviews and focus groups discussed topics around critical pedagogy, learning Ethnic Studies, and experiences in their teacher education programs. I asked teachers to share artifacts that embodied their relationship to Ethnic Studies; in so doing, the artifacts added depth to how and what they attribute as Ethnic Studies. For this article, I focus on two teachers' portraits to understand how they utilized their Ethnic Studies backgrounds and the ways Ethnic Studies sustained their careers. The two teachers each had over a decade of classroom experience, and I present an in-depth portrayal of how their lives and careers over time were influenced by Ethnic Studies. All names are pseudonyms.

Participants

A seasoned community organizer, Cassie Ventura's education has taken shape in several countries because her father served in the U.S. Navy. At the time of the study, Cassie was completing her 11th year of teaching and has taught all levels of elementary grades. This Pinay-identified teacher believes Ethnic Studies has impacted her life. She noted it has "given me a perspective in how I live and learn and teach on a daily basis." Cassie continued, Ethnic Studies

> has impacted me in a way that it has become a part of my everyday life and the struggle that I know I am a part of. The struggle for basic human rights for all, the right to learn about history through multiple perspectives, not just from the perspective of the people in positions of power.

Born and raised in Los Angeles, California, Gabe Baltazar currently lives in the San Francisco Bay Area and anticipates a return to LA. During the study, Gabe was entering his 15th year of teaching. A longtime activist, Gabe connects his background to Ethnic Studies to "self-study" and "some undergraduate courses" as well as his work as a community organizer in the Filipino community. He shared that Ethnic Studies impacted his life by sharpening his racial analysis and offered him "a stronger class analysis." When asked what teachers without a background in Ethnic Studies learn about it to support them as teachers, Gabe said teachers can develop a "critical race analysis, awareness of privilege, and practice of solidarity."

Analysis

All of the data were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Throughout the data collection process and after each interview and focus group, I utilized portraiture as a tool of an impressionistic record to reflect and discern shifts in perspective, pointing to puzzles and dilemmas (methodological, conceptual, ethical), and to document emerging hypotheses and interpretations. The impressionistic record was central to my analysis, as it supported the discovery of patterns, ideas, and phenomena in tandem with each participant's insights (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). This iterative and reflective coding process supported my analysis (Saldaña, 2015). Within each portrait, I sought to advance the portraiture method by folding in texts that punctuate key themes in the portrait while identifying how the stories carry resonances with my experience with Ethnic Studies (Curammeng, 2020b). The Ethnic Studies portraits that follow are not linear, and I invite readers always to be *"*listening for the metaphors, the images, the allusions people use, and the repetitive refrains that lace their talk" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2016, p. 23), all of which are within and across the exemplars shared herein. Findings from this study take up portraiture's narrative stylings of storytelling and documentation. We begin first with Cassie Ventura's portrait and then move to Gabe Baltazar's portrait.

Cassie's Portrait: Transnational and Familial Ways of Knowing

with each rice grain i pick up
A piece of my childhood
Returns to its place in my mind
In the family, is a picture
. . . lost in rice and cleaning
Photos and memories

—Virginia R. Cerenio, *Returning a Borrowed Tongue*

"Ethnic Studies—what does it mean, right?" Cassie clarifies as she makes her way around the dining table into the kitchen. For the second interviews, I asked all of the teachers to share artifacts that represent their relationships with Ethnic

Studies. The school year ended a few weeks prior to meeting, so her house was most convenient for our interview. "So, I'm going to bust it out for you and you're going to laugh. Actually, this is one of the first things that came up to my mind." My back was facing the kitchen before I could turn and see what she was retrieving. "It's kind of random. It's not really related to the classroom, but it's related to my history." Cassie returns and places a medium-sized Mitsubishi rice cooker at the center of the table. My own family's rice cooker enters my mind as the fond and familiar clink of aluminum chimes in—lid rattling pot. "Let me tell you why though because it's specific about this rice cooker. . . . It's older than me!" Cassie's display of excitement connecting Ethnic Studies and the treasured appliance fills the room. "It was my mom and dad's when they first moved here from the Philippines. And, when I went up to college . . ." Cassie gushingly describes. "It's still in good shape, too!" I state. "And, it makes *the best* rice!" Cassie continues. "I think about what it represents. It represents the history of my parents' migration here and sort of the push factors of them moving here." A memory of being scolded by my grandmother for not forcefully squeezing together fistfuls of rice in the cloudy water flashes—Grandma demonstrating how you properly wash, squeeze, rinse, and tilt the pot not to lose any kernels of rice. "It's awesome," I offer admiringly.

Cassie recounts how her mother gave her the rice cooker when she went to college and that she has been using it ever since.

> To me it represents a lot of our family history. It's really funny because it's just an object, when I see it, I think about my parents, their struggle, but yet not just that, but when they came here, they still kept who they were. Do you know what I mean?

Cassie continues:

> Now, I should say it's cliché. It's only because I've just heard it so much the whole saying, "know history, know self," right? When I was in college, I was really trying to search for that: What is that? Who am I? How come I'm in the freaking United States? Who would have I been if my parents didn't move here and meet here and have a family here? Who I would be, if I were in the Philippines? Would I be a teacher? Would I be doing something else?

Connecting Cassie's affection for her family's rice cooker to the opening epigraph of Filipina poet Virginia Cerenio's poem, the rice cooker and rice itself, then, are both symbols and a source of memory and meaning. Because her father was serving in the U.S. Navy, the backdrop upon which her childhood and schooling rests consisted of early interactions with students with a range of national, linguistic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. Coloma's (2013) interpretation of empire and education is productive here, suggesting Cassie's transnational education "highlights the cross-border movements of people, information, materials, and capital" (p. 650), which in turn influences how she understands the lives of the students and families she now serves. "I was there [the Philippines] from second through fifth grade. I think of my students who I work with now, it's kinda where they're at."

Portals and Pathways: Transnational Connections

With her first few years of education in the Philippines, Cassie's worldview was shaped by a number of factors. In particular, being a "navy kid" allowed her family the financial and political means to attend a school in the Philippines with children of ambassadors from throughout the world. Cassie's father's serving in the U.S. Navy is indicative of a long-standing knotted relationship between the Philippines and the United States undergirded by war and imperialism and made visible through schooling. Cassie's emphasis of the importance of those "earliest memories" shows up in how and why she teaches in the ways she does with her students—she was the same age of the students she teaches now when these key moments occurred.

Cassie continued to share more of her education in the Philippines, about her school and a nearby housing complex.

> I remember one of my earliest memories is looking down my street and there was a huge wall, and we'd bike up and down the street, me and my brothers and there would be this door in the wall and there would be people walking through that door. And I remember vividly asking, *Where are they going? What are they doing? What is this place?*

It was not until one of the maids in her house told her, "Don't you know, people like me who don't live in the house like I do, that's where they live. They go on the other side of the wall." Cassie points out,

> Whenever people talk about my politicization, or how I came to doing community work, that's one of my earliest memories of thinking, Why? Why is it that I'm on this side of the wall, and why is it that there are people on that side of the wall?

As a young person, Cassie's curiosities were piqued because of the physical wall between herself and others. People she lived close to and played with were shuffling along a narrow pathway through a tiny door. Movements beyond another side of the wall usher Cassie's assertion not to view her students as separate from their family units. In another conversation, Cassie makes the point clearer, stating,

> There has to be an entry point, right? As an educator, this is our entry point that these kids that we have, that come through our doors every day—but I don't see it as like here there's this kid—they have a family or community that's attached to them.

She continued to describe the importance of understanding how students' families are essential partners in teaching. Chances to engage with and familiarize yourself with students' families must be taken. Cassie offers,

> At any moment, I feel like it's an opportunity for us to do that, too. Build community with our families and for the students to know that that's what it is. It's like, "I am a

> part of your community." "Here is you"— because that's how they see themselves. "Here is me, here is my family, here is my teacher, my classmates"—recognizing that is their support and how can we give each kid the opportunity to use their voices. I feel like they're maybe not taught to speak up, taught not to voice.

In this way, Cassie's classroom "doors" function as portals—inviting, opening, and maintaining a connection to her students' families and communities.

In our many conversations on teaching, Cassie shared that she encourages her students to "speak up" and use their "voice" in ways that diverge from how other teachers they had and will have might encourage or interpret. She explains,

> If you say something that's contradictory to what your teacher is saying and I'm like, "No, *please* question." I mean I might be the teacher here, but I am also a student. I am learning from you; I learn every day from you.

Cassie's practice enacts a Freirean dialectic—valuing her students and herself as producers of knowledge. Cassie acknowledges the fractures and fissures characteristic of schooling. To teach with integrity, to understand the importance of wholeness in relation to students, entails tapping into experiences that were not taught in mainstream teacher preparation or even her own schooling. Rather, it involves Cassie drawing from the well of her Ethnic Studies background to inform her practice and pedagogy, centering the relationships she develops with her students, their families, and the communities they represent.

Ethnic Studies Shaping Teacher Identity: "Being a Pinay Teacher, Here"

"And here it is! You're gonna love it," she gleefully smiles. She pulls out a pale brown paper, delicate yet carefully kept. The handwriting is neat and innocent. The relic reads, *"I Want to be a Teacher*!" She continues,

> I was seven years old, first grade or something and I guess I've always wanted to be a teacher. It wasn't until I took a teacher education class that I was like, "I can do this! I can work with youth. I can do that." That's when it really shifted for me. I think it dawned on me, too, that I didn't grow up with Filipino teachers. Even at my international school . . . I was in the Philippines, and my teachers weren't even Filipino!

She chuckles. "The youth need to see someone who looks like them and understands what their families go through." Indeed, there is value as well as a "need" for students of Color to learn from teachers of Color; especially important is her distinction that these teachers "understand" the multiple contexts that shape a student's family context. Cassie's perspective is not simply an acknowledgment of only "what their families go through" but is tied to her ability—developed through Ethnic Studies—to acknowledge and analyze the historical, sociocultural, and structural contexts that affect the material conditions of her students, their families, and their

communities. The school Cassie teaches at is predominantly made up of students of Color from immigrant and working-class homes with mostly teachers of Color. Her example touches upon how she understands the community she works in but also alludes to the ways her ethnic studies sensibilities inform that understanding.

> I've always teased about this. Anything to get these kids to love you because if you get this kid to love you as a teacher, and respect you, you can teach them. They will really take in what you're trying to teach them—math, whatever subject you're teaching.

I sit there taking it all in; I can sense the luminance of what Cassie is sharing. She's grateful, humble, and affirmed in her teaching. Questions swell my mind: What would it mean to support teachers' capacities to love their students? How can Ethnic Studies develop a love for learning?

> [Students] feel more freely to write about their experiences in relationship to their race or their culture. They can express it and say it. They can say it without feeling like my teacher isn't going understand; it's more like, "My teacher's gonna get it." So I can say this because I know they're gonna get it. Or if my teacher doesn't understand, then I can actually explain. I think it's those core things. That's the value of being a Pinay teacher here.

Cassie taught her students to know that they possess the language to convey what they mean and to do so "freely." Freedom and "getting them to love you" in this way is reminiscent of what Freire (2005) has described as the role of love in teaching: "It is impossible to teach without a forged, invented, and well-thought-out capacity to love" (p. 3). That a student of Color's teacher is "gonna get it" is encouraging. Cassie's calm confidence sharing the effectiveness of her teaching is embodied practice; it is precisely an asset because of her Ethnic Studies background. I can see it in her eyes and can't help but think to myself, how valuable *you* are to your students.

Accessing Ethnic Studies: The "This" of It All

Cassie discusses the confusion some students entering her class have when she pushes them to critique and question what they're learning, to question their teacher. "I just keep thinking about where I was at as a young student in public schools in the United States. . . . I wish I had half of what you're getting. I think that's part of our responsibility." Cassie picks up:

> Maybe we're empowered by that idea that I didn't get this. So, you're going to get it. You will have access to this, you'll have this experience, you'll be able to put words to your experiences and you'll be able to articulate it in a way and if not, hopefully when you get to middle school or when you get to high school, when you have Ethnic Studies, "Wow!" You know? And you're not just getting it when you

> get to college and all a sudden, it's like, "What's going on here?" Because that's kind of how I felt. . . . I was a part of the community, I knew I was part of something larger than I was but—oh, that's the role I could play.

Cassie's assertion "I didn't get this. So, you will have this" is useful for examining how Ethnic Studies underscores teachers' motivations for teaching their students; they didn't get "this," so their students certainly will. *This* offers a critical register for thinking about what Ethnic Studies *does* for teachers' preparation and practice. In other words, "this" captures a host of experiences and connections to Ethnic Studies that Cassie and the teachers in the study maintain were instrumental in their process of becoming teachers. So then, what is the "this" of Ethnic Studies? For Cassie, not having Ethnic Studies until college was a prime reason for teaching in the ways she does. Ethnic Studies is a form of subversive knowledge because the stories, learning, and experiences are in direct opposition to the majoritarian knowledge pervasive in schooling.

Three scholars commonly taught within Ethnic Studies support a deeper understanding about the "this" of Ethnic Studies. First, drawing connections to W. E. B. Du Bois's work (Du Bois & Edwards, 2008) and the Color line, he posed, "How does it feel to be a problem?" Du Bois was not suggesting that Black people were not talked about; rather, Du Bois illuminates the Reconstruction Era and his experiences of being Black and being considered property. Similarly, Gayatri Spivak's (1988) query "Can the subaltern speak?" was not about whether the subaltern can speak; more precisely, Spivak led us to consider the barriers and structures that keep the subaltern from speaking. *This*, then, is different; it is subversive, healing, celebratory, and goes beyond rote curricula and banking models of teaching. Again, from hooks (2009), "education as a tool of colonization that serves to teach students allegiance to the status quo has been so much the accepted norm that no blame can be attributed to the huge body of educators who simply taught as they were" (p. 30). Taken together, one can assert for Ethnic Studies that *this* is about self-love and in many ways traverses the Freirean model of praxis: guided by critical thought, reflection, and returning to move toward action(s). Cassie did not have *this* as a student but made it so her elementary-aged students will; Ethnic Studies would be theirs.

Gabe's Portrait: Community Organizing, Community Classroom

Gabe reflected on early moments in his teaching, how he came to teach at Ramaytush High, and how the school has changed. Prior to coming to Ramaytush, he taught for 3 years at Costanoan High School up the hill.

> I thought, OK, I'll go into teaching. I'll go to this program at Ignatius University at night and I'll go into teaching in the day. Even though I had no prior experience. And I'm going to continue organizing. I linked up with folks who were doing Filipino community work.

An important factor in his teaching revolved around his activism and organizing, a thread that pulls close his path as a teacher. Here Gabe reflects upon the first years as a teacher:

> I ended up not getting asked back after my third year. And also, almost thankfully so. I actually didn't want to come back for a fourth year. So, I left teaching. I went to do this non-profit work. We did a lot of radical curriculum building and leadership training. I developed curriculum for their program. The only reason I came back into teaching was because my wife, at the time, got pregnant, and we needed health insurance, and more stability and more money. But then I was only making $28,000 a year! That's what emergency credentialed teachers make; I didn't finish the program.

That at one point Gabe left the teaching profession is not unique. Nearly 40%–50% of teachers leave the profession within their first 5 years of teaching. Moreover, only 14% of all public school teachers in the United States are racial minorities (Feistritzer et al., 2011). Gabe's decision to return to teaching at a school with mostly students of Color demonstrates this. He says,

> Going to the district, I was like, "I wanna work at Ramaytush!" because Ramaytush High always had the worst reputation, at that time even in '02. When I interviewed, they were like, "Why do you wanna teach here?" I said, "This is the place to teach, because this is where folks are most struggling."

Gabe recalls a turning point when he realized how he can infuse his activism with his teaching. He recalls a close friend, Philip, also from Los Angeles, who got into teaching. Gabe shares,

> [Philip] got into teaching. He started to really apply all this radical, critical pedagogy and started to get a lot of press. . . . Then he moved up here. I was like, wow! That practice is really what should be happening in this space. I gotta find a way to synthesize my organizing work, which is taking up all of my time, into my classroom practice, which *should* be taking up most of my time. It was when I was able to marry the two, it was when I was able to become the teacher that I am now.

For Gabe, learning to merge his commitment to activism with his teaching supported the development of an "ideological literacy" (Camangian, 2013) and would contribute to setting a firm pedagogical foundation to enact such activism in his teaching and classroom.

Early Educational Formations: "That Class Was an Ethnic Studies Class"

In the sixth grade, Gabe was placed in a Spanish bilingual class because of his surname, Baltazar. "There were relatively few Filipinos, even though it's Historic Filipinotown." Gabe said, "I was a minority within a majority minority community. Moments clearly felt isolated and alone. But then in hindsight, that class was an

Ethnic Studies class." Gabe continues to talk about his experience learning from Ms. Lopez.

> She had just graduated from California University, a young Chicana teacher. She was probably 24 years old. She taught us about the Aztecs and the Olmecs and the Toltecs and the Inca. And I'm like, "This is supposed to be history!? What about George Washington?"

Gabe continues, "This Filipino kid asking this brown teacher, *righteous* brown teacher, why we weren't learning about any other history. Code for my sixth-grade consciousness for 'Why aren't we learning white American history?'—that's all in hindsight." We can only wonder whether Ms. Lopez's background was in Ethnic Studies; to be clearly teaching against a Eurocentric curriculum at the time—late 1970s, early 1980s—however, alludes to her criticality. A Chicana teacher serving majority students of Color in critical ways supports the notion that, indeed, teachers of Color hold higher expectations for students of Color (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018). For example, Gabe attributed Ms. Lopez's impact on him as a sixth grader to his political consciousness later as an organizer in college:

> So, was it college? Sure. But I think there was always something there. It goes back to Ms. Lopez—her really Chicano Studies–framed sixth-grade class. Everything. I went to a different English class, but history was Chicano Studies. Art and culture. Shit that we'd make was shaped by Chicano culture and people I was around, and *especially* her. Especially her. Like, "You're not Mexican. I get that. But you're Filipino." She'd always say, "You're brown. You should know who you are." . . . "Learn about this. Learn who you are and where you're from." Yeah, I didn't get it. And it was just like [snaps fingers], in a huge way.

Connecting Neighborhoods of History and Politicization

Gabe recalls memories with his parents. "It's kind of garden-variety Filipino '60s migration," Gabe mentions. "To some degree, I think my parents were also trying to figure out who they were in this new context," Gabe shared. He continues to share about growing up in Los Angeles.

> In my neighborhood was the Satanas, and that was one of the first Filipino gangs. I always looked to them of these models of strength. Like man, that's what it is to be Filipino, in a sea of Mexicans. This was one of the things that I really valued and appreciated.

He continues, "But I managed to stay away from that. And, I think just knowing people in the neighborhood, they were just like, 'Nah, he's an athlete, he does graffiti'—I was basically left alone." Gabe's reflections of Satanas highlights an insightful history of Los Angeles more generally and intersections of masculinity, racialization, and youth cultures specifically. Gabe's childhood community in Echo Park, therefore, became one of his first classrooms.

"Can you talk a little about your transition from high school to college?" I ask. "It was Gabrielino Community College. I took this Filipino American Studies class, ironically taught by this former CIA operative turned priest!" Gabe recalls. "[He] ended up being my professor at Gabrielino College. He ended up connecting me to this dude named Roy Morales." Gabe shares:

> Uncle Roy started this organization called SIPA, Search to Involve Pilipino Americans (SIPA), which was just down the street from my mom's. Which I had gone to several times. . . . And I never came back. *Until* I came back as this volunteer intern while I was at ULA. So, the Philippine studies class linked me to Uncle Roy, who linked me back to SIPA, who, when I transferred to ULA, I stayed in touch with. And that's really where the reconnection to my own neighborhood came from. I had to go to ULA to recognize what was all around me.

In Gabe's voice, I could hear a fondness of those memories. The experience Gabe described is characteristic of many Ethnic Studies classes; his "reconnection to my own neighborhood" is an example of "community responsive pedagogy," the "connecting classroom learning with students' home and community life, and helping students learn to analyze and act on community needs" (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015, p. 115). Gabe shares about his peers,

> We did a lot of organizing. It became clear. There were a lot of ULA kids who wanted to do Filipino community work. I think that was significant in my own development, because after that Philippine studies class, that led me to looking out for other Ethnic Studies opportunities. I took a bunch of Ethnic Studies classes after that point on.

Gabe would later connect all of these experiences as "just the spark" that led to an "explosion of activity and desire to learn and study." Recalling times at ULA, he shared how his roommates, his "Chicano brothers," were influential in his active pursuit of social justice as a student organizer. "I even got arrested at the Chicano Studies Campaign, '93, I think it was '93, '94 . . . really synthesizing and bringing in my Filipino identity in solidarity with that effort," he grins.

> That was significant, formative, and it even fueled more of my clear understanding that all of this shit needs to be taken back to the communities that all of us are from. I had the luxury of being from a community that was relatively near. Then, I was able to bring all of those folks who had that same outlook that everything we learn here needs to be benefitting and brought back to the places that we're from.

Many more lessons would follow as Gabe moved toward organizing, connecting, and building with people in Los Angeles and, later, nationally. "We would go all over the country trying to organize folks around this politic," he shares. "But I think it got amplified, and my critical consciousness got amplified, from doing that particular work," Gabe said. "It amazes me and my mom. We talk all the time. My younger brothers, we talk all the time. And we're like, 'Dude . . . how did we get

here?'" While in sixth grade, Ms. Lopez would be his first Ethnic Studies teacher. I have learned that it was also a constellation of teachers, community figures, and family members that were central in forming his identities. Gabe's eyes peer down and rest on the olive green picnic table. A brief pause enters—he is reflecting on all that was just shared. I seize that pause to think of my first Ethnic Studies teachers, some of whom are Gabe's contemporaries. These reflections help me think of a broadened definition for what a classroom could be, how Ethnic Studies shapes teaching. A buzz from the overhead fluorescent lights makes itself known so as to confirm our meditations.

Discussion

> True history has often been hidden, obscured, lied about, distorted. It is up to students, progressive scholars, and truth seekers to "dig into history" and find the gems.
>
> —Yuri Kochiyama

The field of teacher education is witnessing what some may characterize as an Ethnic Studies Education turn. The growing support for the movement for K–12 Ethnic Studies by students, families, community members, and teachers is revealing a necessary (re)imagining of what education can become. While a growing body of scholarship is detailing the affordances of Ethnic Studies Education, the same metrics previously used to determine its "efficacy" requires new ways of thinking, especially for teacher educators—metrics not easily seen or measurable in a traditional sense. Imagine the transformative possibilities for future teachers and the students they serve, a teacher education centering knowledges of self and community, learning of comparative histories, consciousness raising, and self-love.

This study explored how two veteran teachers of Color drew upon their backgrounds in Ethnic Studies and the ways Ethnic Studies sustained their work as teachers. Ethnic Studies provided the teachers in this study a particular criticality not developed in their teacher education. This criticality aligns with Pham's (2018) research on the need for teacher education to "equip them with tools and opportunities to transfer their justice-oriented goals and understandings into effective practice" (p. 68). These portraits build on a growing body of research exploring the affordances of Ethnic Studies in education by acknowledging how formative Ethnic Studies was early on in their education as well as the nontraditional spaces where critical consciousness raising and politicization occur. Findings suggest that beyond a social justice orientation, Ethnic Studies allowed for a connection to students whose ethnic and racial backgrounds differed from their own, as was the case for Cassie's Filipino background to her Latinx students and Gabe's elementary teacher, Ms. Lopez, for shaping how he understood his history through lessons as a Chicana. The teachers' portraits highlight how certain activist spaces were central to their politicization and ultimately shaped how they teach. Through the teachers' narratives, we learn how Ethnic Studies offered a lens for how they viewed their role

as teachers. More important were the ways the teachers identified Ethnic Studies was central to their purpose as teachers and offered a moral compass developing meaningful relationships with the students and families they serve.

Examining Ethnic Studies and teacher education in this way challenges the simplistic notion that placing a person of Color in front of students of Color is a silver bullet. Fortunately, there exist programs not explicitly within mainstream teacher education that understand the utility of Ethnic Studies and preparing future educators (Cuauhtin et al., 2019; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2010). Equally important are the ways Ethnic Studies served as a foundation for Cassie and Gabe to guide their critical reflection and practice as teachers. Christine Sleeter's (2011) analysis of the impact of Ethnic Studies in education succinctly stated, "It works." These portraits suggest that there is utility and value for Ethnic Studies in the preparation of teachers of Color.

What Ethnic Studies offers teacher education involves a "finding of gems." Therefore, guided by Cassie and Gabe's portraits, I offer short reflections for the field before outlining the study's implications: How must teacher education prepare future educators to understand interlocking systems of white supremacy, colonialisms, cis-heteropatriarchy, and anti-Blackness in schooling? What work must teacher educators do to continuously confront their complicity in these systems? What role do Ethnic Studies pedagogies have in preservice teachers' preparation? What lessons can be gleaned from grassroots education and activist organizations? How might Ethnic Studies offer new imaginings of "metrics" relative to teaching and learning?

Implications point toward curricular shifts to engage Ethnic Studies scholarship as necessary for the preparation of all teachers and can be utilized within teacher professional development. For researchers, applying an Ethnic Studies lens to study teacher education is especially productive given its attention to interlocking systems of power connected to the historical and material conditions of schooling. Finally, an important lesson Ethnic Studies offers is encapsulated in the wisdom of the late activist Yuri Kochiyama. To imagine a new way of teacher education, we all must "dig into history," and we can be certain that with Ethnic Studies, we will "find the gems" (see also Saunders & Tajiri, 1993, p. 142). We must be ever cautious to ensure that the "true history" Kochiyama describes is embedded in how the field prepares teachers through Ethnic Studies. She continues, "If we want to change society, we can first begin by transforming ourselves; learning from one another about one another's history, culture, dreams, hopes, personal experiences" (see also Saunders & Tajiri, 1993, p. 142). Ethnic Studies offers teacher education the potential to transform our world and the ways we educate future teachers and students.

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