Tinalak: Weaving Dreams as Filipino Educational Praxis

by Jeffrey Tangonan Acido and Jeffrey Moniz

I am woven
together by a dream
Birthed out of struggle
and resistance
of my ancestors

My threads are only as strong
As they are together,
Side by side,
In and out,
Woven experiences
That cannot be separated
from the brown body
of the abaca
of the land

We are not patterns
but visions
of a liberated tomorrow.

We are the woven Tinalak

Tinalak is not simply a woven pattern, an indigenous artifact, or a piece of clothing made from abaca fibers. It is a vision and a dream received by the women of the T'boli community in Mindanao, Philippines. The dreams are received by the weaver from the spirits and ancestors and guide their hands to create the intricate and beautiful patterns of the tinalak.

The scholars of this issue comprise the many different threads that make up the tinalak. All the scholars either implicitly or explicitly draw strength and wisdom from their Filipino ancestry, and, woven together, they form a pattern of the many threads, by no means exhaustive of the experiences of Filipinos in Hawai'i, the Philippines, and the diaspora. This endeavor to name, articulate, and weave a wide spectrum of Filipino experiences and identities aims to illuminate our various educational journeys. This includes negotiating what it means to be Filipino in a context that can be hostile and, more often than not, one that renders the Filipino subject as Other or invisible.

The first two pieces present a "Laying the Foundation" theme for this edition. **Patricia Espiritu Halagao** critically assesses the condition of Filipino K–12 students in the structures of Hawai'i's public schools. Next, **Niki Libarios** and **Robert Bachini** continue building critical awareness of the *status quo* up the educational pipeline by examining the conditions and opportunities for Filipino students at the post-secondary level. The essays of Halagao, Libarios, and Bachini lay out the compelling rationale for the reflective actions that are taken up in the essays of the following sections, which entail curricular, epistemological, and methodological interventions.

In the second set of essays, the theme of "Identity Transformations" is a common thread. The authors describe their reflective actions directed at improving academic achievement of Filipino learners. They espouse linguistically and culturally responsive pedagogy and indigenous methods centered on Filipino identities. **Julius Bajet Soria's** case study, guided by an indigenous Ilokano methodology, *pakasaritaan,* focuses on the central role that the learning of one's heritage language can play in affirming identity and fostering valuable academic support. He found that language communities and cultural institutions serve as valued resources for the academic and professional success of Filipino students. **Raju Desai** explores the traumas of his home community and the possibilities for healing those traumas through an open pedagogical philosophy grounded in *kapwa*—a core value from Filipino indigenous psychology. He shows how this pedagogy provides opportunities for students to find interconnectedness and a sense of where

they find a way to connect with the social world they find themselves in Hawai'i. **Jeffrey Moniz** engages in storytelling empowered by the indigenous perspectives and methodologies advanced by some of the rising new scholars featured in this issue. He relies on weaving the various threads of his inquiry into a theoretical frame that shows aspects of the identities of Filipino-descended individuals beyond the immigrant and second generations of the Filipino American community.

The final papers support the idea of "Bridging Communities." These last essays shift the focus from the issues of Filipino identity to that of critical reflection on actions that can be taken, in collaboration with others, aimed at transforming the social conditions of Filipinos in Hawai'i. **Jeffrey Tangonan Acido** reflects on his informal educational experiences working in marginalized, oppressed communities and how those experiences led to the emergence of a pedagogical praxis, *nakem* pedagogy, that uses stories to give meaning to the lives of the community. These stories, which are bound together as an expression of the collective values and beliefs, become a basis of practical knowledge for these communities. **Hannah M. Tavares** also brings the idea of community into a broader view of education in her study of the work of a community-based organization of women in Hawai'i. She describes the collaborative actions these women took that resulted in culturally-relevant, community-based responses that addressed pressing community issues and the social knowledge that unfolded as a result.

It is time to move away from the deficiency models that paint our communities as lacking. Instead, we must begin anew to weave the dream and the vision that center on the wealth of wisdom and values that we carry from our communities.

Like the weaving of the *tinalak*, these articles took a process and a method to be able to let the wisdom of the ancestors weave into our words and worlds. What is presented in the articles is sourced from our life's work—years of preoccupation with the struggle and survival of our community. These scholars do not simply present research; they represent a commitment to hold themselves accountable to the people who have taught them to love and be loved—their commitment is as strong as the *abaca* fibers that hold the *tinalak* together. They realize that each thread of experience constitutes an embodiment of and extensions to the experiences of their ancestors. The articles, when woven together, represent not just a journal, but also a dream and a vision that stems from each generation's will to make living in Hawai'i and the diaspora affirmative of who they are and want to be.

We are optimistic that the woven tinalak that makes up our diverse experiences will inform and instruct issues of schooling, educational practices, and the field of educational inquiry. We dream that the particular threads that make up our Filipino students, educators, and administrators become one of many starting points in taking serious the ideals of an emancipatory and democratic education. Through the process of threading and weaving together our stories and essays we hope to invite you to participate in a dialogue that revalues the wealth of wisdom that Filipinos bring to K–12 and higher education.