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Stories on Adversities of Filipino Teachers as Teachers in the USA: Basis for a Guide on Coping

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the adversities of overseas Filipino teachers in public schools at Illinois State. This study utilized a narrative inquiry research design as it aimed to unravel consequential stories of overseas Filipino teachers' lives as told by them in their own words and worlds. In this qualitative case, the narratives of the overseas Filipino teachers working as teachers in Illinois, the journey of each teacher based on Campbell's Hero's Journey framework, and the common adversities across the teachers' journey were explored through interviews. The study involved six (6) participants, composed of overseas Filipino teachers deployed in different public schools in Illinois State. Prekindergarten through grade 12 students in Illinois attended public schools, which were run by superintendents and school boards who were elected locally. The data analysis tool was thematic, with a specific focus on Campbell's Hero's Journey framework. The narratives of overseas Filipino teachers in Illinois reveal their pursuit of better opportunities and professional growth despite financial, cultural, and emotional challenges, with resilience and community support helping them adapt. Their experiences align with Campbell's Hero's Journey framework, as they navigate trials, moments of doubt, and ultimate transformation, finding fulfillment in their careers while continuing to evolve and give back. Across the journeys of these six Filipino teachers, common adversities include: Financial Stability and Living Conditions; Personal and Professional Growth; and Emotional and Mental Strain on Teachers.

INTRODUCTION

The term Adversity Quotient (AQ) refers to the capacity to overcome difficulties, adapt to setbacks, and grasp chances. Overcoming barriers requires tenacity and resolve to get over challenges and disappointments, exhibiting a proactive attitude to problem-solving. It takes flexibility and the ability to move through difficult circumstances with an optimistic and helpful attitude to respond to obstacles. This entails adapting tactics, picking up lessons from mistakes, and staying motivated in the face of challenges. Taking advantage of opportunities entails identifying and acting upon advantageous situations that emerge, even in difficult settings. It exhibits a proactive mindset and the capacity to transform possible setbacks into opportunities.

Teachers' professional competence and capacity to persevere in the face of adversity are greatly impacted by their Adversity Quotient (AQ). AQ and professional development are closely related, according to Marashi and Fotoohi (2017), who also argue that teachers with higher AQ are more suited to manage the demands and complexities of their line of work. While there is a dearth of research on the precise relationship between AQ and professional competence, what is known about it is that teachers with high AQ are more proactive, resilient, and adaptive in their approach. Because of their resilience, they are able to overcome challenges with ease, keep a positive outlook, and actively look for possibilities for personal development—all qualities that are critical to professional success.

Adversity Quotient has a significant role in both individual and organizational life since it is a determinant of learning behavior, learning outcomes, graduate quality, and life satisfaction in the educational context (Singh & Parveen, 2018; Sigit *et al.*, 2019; Puspitacandri *et al.*, 2020). The term "adaptability" describes a person's ability to persevere through adversity and try to find solutions (Tigchelaar & Bekhet 2015; Hastuti *et al.*, 2018). Additional definitions of AQ include the ability to deal with adversity (Parvathy & Praseeda 2014), the capacity to face and overcome challenges (Woo & Song, 2015; Suryadi & Santoso, 2017), and the persistence of an individual in the face of setbacks in order to achieve success (Suryaningrum *et al.*, 2020). Additionally, according to Abella *et al.* (2016) and Zhao *et al.* (2021), AQ helps people become more resilient and stronger in the face of daily obstacles and achieve life satisfaction. This has an effect on performance (Tansiongco & Ibarra, 2020).

Further, teachers are required to do more than just transfer knowledge; they must also serve as role models for their charges, inspiring them to achieve academic excellence. In recent years, a large number of professionals, including educators, have emigrated from the Philippines in quest of better job possibilities abroad. This change has been influenced by a number of social, political, and economic variables (Ospina & Medina, 2020). Many teachers have left the Philippines in quest of better economic and living conditions due to the nation's high unemployment rate, low earnings, high inflation, and civil turmoil (Berger, 2021). A significant rise in the number of professionals

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relocating overseas is reported by Kerr *et al.* (2016), highlighting the significance of this development. Hence, teachers prefer to work and teach overseas that offer high salary. Research by Marashi and Rashidian (2018) showed that AQ has an impact on teachers' pedagogical success: a measure of a teacher's skill level. According to data from the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA), 1,500 teachers on average left the country each year between 2013 and 2017 to work overseas (Santos, 2023).

Teachers also face a number of challenges in their line of work as educators. One of their main issues is a heavy workload, which contributes to stress and burnout. Teachers frequently have other responsibilities outside of the classroom, such as lesson planning, paper grading, and meeting attendance. Because their occupations can be very demanding and time-consuming, teachers often do not have much time for relaxation and rejuvenation. Due to the high expectations placed on them to perform well in the classroom, teachers experience added stress and anxiety. Collaboration and teamwork break down when instructors are overworked and stressed, which impacts their capacity to interact with students and coworkers. They also find it challenging to concentrate on teaching and learning, which may have a detrimental effect on the performance of the students.

Teachers usually work long hours in the classroom as well as outside of it, which can leave them with little time for self-care or work-life balance. Teachers deal with difficult student behavior in addition to the demands of their work and a lack of parental and official support. These challenges result in emotions of dissatisfaction, loneliness, and job dissatisfaction, which ultimately affect how well students learn and are instructed in the classroom. These challenges that high school teachers face also have a big effect on their capacity to lead in the classroom. Relatively, Dureza (2022) demonstrated that workplace well-being, organizational dedication, and job satisfaction are all positively related to welfare satisfaction in the context of foreign teachers. This suggests that when respondents' welfare is positively addressed, their well-being, employment fulfillment and dedication to the school organization will all increase.

In the study of Macapagong *et al.* (2023), they discussed that one of the primary challenges Filipino teachers face in the United States is the adjustment to a new culture. The adjustment process can be overwhelming, and the teachers may face cultural shock and feel isolated as they navigate the American education system. Working in a different culture can also provide Filipino teachers with opportunities for professional growth and development. Correspondingly, the diverse experiences and obstacles that come with teaching overseas have a profound impact on the AQ of Filipino teachers working overseas. The main reason for this is because they have to adapt to new educational systems, customs, and languages in their host countries, which requires them to make cultural and linguistic adaptations. This calls for a high degree

of resilience and adaptation and can cause a great deal of stress. Additionally, abroad Filipino teachers often confront the problem of being away from their families and support networks, which can produce feelings of isolation and homesickness. These difficulties are exacerbated by the professional demands of fulfilling demanding standards and expectations in a foreign setting. Socioeconomic considerations also put additional strain on them, such as the requirement to support their family financially back home, which encourages them to keep going in the face of adversity.

Everybody faces adversity. This reality is not an exception for teachers. The various tasks that teachers play are rife with difficult social, psychological, emotional, and professional obstacles that can occasionally manifest as devastating storms that threaten one's ability to continue working in the public school system. Teachers must have the ability to overcome the challenges they face in their line of work, according to Republic Act No. 7836, popularly known as the Philippine Teachers Professionalization Act of 1994, which strengthened the management and monitoring of teaching practice in the Philippines. Teachers must have some degree of adversity management skills to function professionally.

Relatively, teachers' personal, social, intellectual, and professional capabilities play a crucial role in carrying out such adversities and challenges. In Illinois State, United States of America, overseas Filipino teachers are currently facing their equal share of adversities in learning delivery, involvement in the community, and career advancement. Overseas Filipino teachers often face unique challenges related to cultural adaptation, language proficiency, work visa requirements, and unfamiliar educational systems while teaching and holding responsibility in a foreign country. In addition to this, advances and changes in technology and reforms in the curriculum hold a wide range of educational barriers and adversities. The way teachers respond to adversity influences not only their own performance but also the performance of their students. For years, the researcher, as a teacher himself, has observed the adversities faced by overseas Filipino teachers and the challenges of being an overseas Filipino teacher. Hence, this research focuses on the ability of overseas Filipino teachers to go beyond turmoil and triumph against adversities in their careers and their duties overseas.

Teachers face challenges in their daily lives. In addition to carrying out their assigned individualized lesson plans, office work, and extracurricular activities, teachers also have a duty to see to the students' moral and physical requirements. The function of a teacher has changed significantly. The invention of the computer has revolutionized schooling. The process of teaching and learning has changed dramatically.

Being an overseas Filipino teacher in Illinois State, United States of America, the researcher is familiar with the difficulties and obstacles that teachers have regularly. This personal story offers a distinctive viewpoint and

insight into the subject of how adversities influence their competence in the classroom. The researcher can add to the body of knowledge on teacher experiences overseas by performing a study on this relationship and possibly offer some insights into how schools and educational organizations can better support teachers in their educational responsibilities. Furthermore, the researcher's experience as a teacher helps to guarantee that the research is anchored in real-world situations and pertinent to the requirements and experiences of overseas Filipino teachers.

Considering the foregoing discussion, the researcher came up with the idea to venture into a field of study that may help the teachers in their encounter against challenges overseas that hinder their professional growth and development. Hence, the study is conceived to come up with the development of a booklet on how to cope with adversity among overseas Filipino teachers working as teachers in Illinois that the researcher as output on the identified narratives of the overseas Filipino teachers working as teachers in Illinois; the journey of each teacher based on Campbell's Hero's Journey framework; and the common adversities across the journey of the teachers.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This study utilized a narrative inquiry research design. Narrative research fell within the realm of social constructivism or the philosophy that people's lived stories captured the complexities and nuanced understanding of their significant experiences (Ntinda, 2020). Narrative research collected and told stories about people's lives. It was a recognized methodology for exploring identity development in educational research. Narrative research appealed to those interested in "constructivist-oriented, qualitative research that examined people's experiences from their perspectives" (Barkhuizen & Consoli, 2021, p.2). It was deeply concerned with personal and individual life experiences and events. It was intimately connected to how people conceived and understood identity. In the field of education, narrative research was often used to explore the ways that teachers constructed their professional identity, especially during early teaching experiences and pre-service teaching. This study employed narrative inquiry as it aimed to unravel consequential stories of overseas Filipino teachers' lives as told by them in their own words and worlds. In this qualitative case, the narratives of the overseas Filipino teachers working as teachers in Illinois, the journey of each teacher based on Campbell's Hero's Journey framework, and the common adversities across the journey of the teachers were explored.

Participants of the Study

The study involved six (6) participants composed of overseas Filipino teachers deployed in different public schools in Illinois State. Prekindergarten through grade 12 students in Illinois attended public schools, which

were run by superintendents and school boards who were elected locally. Chicago Public Schools, common school districts, community college districts, community high school districts, community unit school districts, non-high school districts, special charter districts, and township high school districts were the eight main types of school districts in Illinois. Except for the Chicago Public Schools and the Chicago Community College District, all of these school boards were elected.

The six participants of this study were overseas Filipino teachers (OFTs) who were deployed in various types of public schools across Illinois State, ranging from Pre-K to Grade 12 levels. They were selected based on their current employment as active teachers within the Illinois public school system and their status as Filipino nationals working under overseas contracts. Each participant met the fundamental criterion of being an OFT with direct classroom responsibilities in Illinois' public education system.

Illinois has a diverse public school structure, including Chicago Public Schools, community unit school districts, and township high school districts, among others. The participants were chosen to reflect this diversity in school settings. Their experiences span different districts and grade levels, including early childhood education, elementary, and special education.

The participants were also selected based on their length of teaching experience in the Philippines, their reasons for migrating, and their current teaching roles in Illinois. This criterion ensured that each narrative provided a deep, personal insight into the transition from the Philippine education system to the U.S. public school system.

Sampling Procedure

The desired sample size of teacher-participants was determined using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling, sometimes referred to as judgmental or selective sampling, was a non-probability sampling technique in which participants were chosen by the researcher according to particular traits or standards that were pertinent to the study's goals or topic. Purposive sampling entailed the purposeful selection of people or instances that had specific qualities or experiences that were relevant to the study, in contrast to probability sampling techniques where every member of the population had a known chance of being chosen. This approach was frequently employed by researchers who wanted to examine a particular segment of the population or who wanted to get in-depth information from people who had specialized knowledge, experience, or viewpoints regarding the subject of their study.

The six teacher-participants were carefully chosen based on carefully considered selection criteria. Particular focus was given to the participants' status as Filipino teachers working at public schools in Illinois State, showcasing their distinct viewpoints and experiences within the context of Illinois State education. They taught in traditional classroom settings. Most of the overseas

Filipino teachers in this study are women teaching in southern part of Illinois. Only one participant is male. All of them came from the Philippines with many years of teaching experience. Some taught in private schools, while others worked in public schools. A few also had experience teaching abroad before moving to Illinois. Their years of teaching range from about 10 to 20 years. Most of them started teaching in Illinois between 2018 and 2023. They now work as special education or general education teachers in different public schools. Despite their different backgrounds, they all share a strong dedication to teaching and helping students. They also experienced similar challenges, such as handling student behavior, adjusting to a new school system, and managing cultural differences.

Research Instruments

The procedure of building research instruments that could be suitably pursued in the study collection was known as instrumentation. Data collection was a crucial phase in the analytical process. This study made use of interviews.

Interview

The instrument that was used in conducting the study was an interview. It was conducted with the teachers about their narratives of the overseas Filipino teachers working as teachers in Illinois, the journey of each teacher based on Campbell's Hero's Journey framework, and the common adversities across the journey of the teachers. Validity for guide questions was verified by three experts in the field from the Department of Education. This was to ensure that the questions in the instrument adeptly measured the variables of the study. The items in the interview were critiqued to determine whether they would be retained, improved, or revised depending on their accuracy in measuring the data needed. Letters requesting their assistance in validating the content of the research instrument were furnished. Validation sheets were attached. Upon retrieval of the validation sheets, responses were gathered, and necessary corrections or adjustments were made with the help of the adviser.

Data Gathering Procedure

A set of procedures guided the researcher in gathering all the pertinent data needed for this research. A methodical and rigorous approach was taken during the data collection process in order to guarantee the collection of correct and trustworthy information for this study. The interview session with teacher-participants composed of overseas Filipino teachers deployed in different public schools in Illinois State immediately followed to know the narratives of the overseas Filipino teachers working as teachers in Illinois, the journey of each teacher based on Campbell's Hero's Journey framework, and the common adversities across the journey of the teachers. Interviews were conducted to collect detailed narratives from overseas Filipino teachers in Illinois, focusing on

their backgrounds, experiences, and current teaching conditions. These interviews covered aspects such as their roles in the Philippines, their transition to Illinois, their orientation, any school transfers, family circumstances, teaching responsibilities, and support systems. Each teacher's story was presented as a case study, detailing these elements. Furthermore, narrative inquiry was employed to analyze these narratives through Campbell's Hero's Journey framework. This involved mapping each teacher's experiences to the phases of the Hero's Journey to uncover how their personal journeys aligned with this framework. Finally, qualitative analysis was used to identify and extract common adversities from the narratives.

Permission to audio and video record the proceedings of the interview was sought. The researcher stated in a short paragraph the major objectives of the interview. Simultaneously, the researcher established credibility with the interviewee by maintaining eye contact. Following the interview, the researcher summarized every response and analyzed the main points made by each participant. Each interview was expected to last not more than an hour. The researcher transcribed the recorded interview responses for further analysis. Analysis and interpretation were done to discuss the results and discussion to come up with conclusions and recommendations.

Analysis of Data

The collected data was analyzed and understood using thematic analysis.

Thematic Analysis

In this study, the data analysis tool was thematic, with a specific focus on Campbell's Hero's Journey framework. The Hero's Journey was a structured approach to exploring the narratives of overseas Filipino teachers in Illinois, mapping their adversities and experiences onto the stages of this framework. Through thematic analysis, key themes and patterns that emerged from their stories were identified, such as the challenges they faced (e.g., separation from home, cultural adaptation, professional struggles), their moments of transformation (e.g., learning, overcoming difficulties, growth), and their ultimate return or mastery of their roles. Each narrative was analyzed to identify the teachers' "call to adventure," "ordeal," and "return with the elixir," aligning with the Hero's Journey stages.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to rigorous ethical standards as established by the Research Ethics Committee (REC) of St. Paul University Manila. Before the collection of any primary data, a concise review of the study's goals was conducted, ensuring that all aspects of the research were transparent and in line with the approved protocol. The ethics certificate mandated strict compliance with key review remarks—specifically items 13, 15.3, and 16.4—and the researcher ensured that each condition

was met throughout the research process. This involved continuous monitoring of the study's procedures to maintain high ethical standards, with comprehensive documentation ready for review by the Committee to demonstrate adherence to these requirements.

In addition to following the REC's directives, the study took deliberate steps to secure the informed consent of all participants. The subjects were thoroughly briefed about the research's objectives and their roles, and their voluntary consent was obtained prior to participation. This process guaranteed that the participants understood the purpose of the study and agreed to contribute their experiences willingly. Moreover, in compliance with RA 10173, also known as the Data Privacy Act, all identifiable information was handled with utmost confidentiality. The data were stored securely and participants' names and personal identifiers were omitted to ensure complete anonymity, secrecy, and protection against any potential harm. These measures underscore the study's commitment to ethical research practices and the protection of participants' rights throughout the investigation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Journey of Each Teacher Based on Campbell's Hero's Journey Framework

Participant 1

Departure: The Call to Adventure

The participant's journey begins in the Philippines, where she was a graduate of Psychology with a Bachelor of Arts major in Psychology. Although her formal training was not in education, she ventured into teaching, starting as a nursery teacher in 1999. Over the years, she gained experience in various teaching roles, from elementary school to secondary education. "I worked as a secondary school teacher from 2003 to 2017, learning a lot from being a teacher in public school," she reflected. She taught high school students from 2003 until 2017. During this period, the teacher gained experience and knowledge. Teaching in a public school gave the teacher many opportunities to learn new skills. The experience probably included dealing with different student behaviors, managing classrooms, and teaching various subjects. It also suggests the teacher grew personally and professionally because of the challenges faced. The teacher considers the experience rewarding and educational.

Her decision to move to the United States was not driven by the dream of the "American Dream," but by a suggestion from a friend, a psychologist working at LaSalle. "She told me, 'Submit your resume, we're going to start bringing teachers to the US.'" This friend played a pivotal role in guiding her to apply for a teaching opportunity abroad. Initially uncertain, she submitted her resume in December 2018, thinking, "If I pass, okay; if not, it's not meant to be." After a series of interviews, she found herself preparing to journey to Illinois, unaware of the challenges ahead. She explains that moving to the United States was not her original dream. She was

influenced by her friend's suggestion instead. Her friend, who is a psychologist, encouraged her to apply for a teaching position in the U.S. Initially, she wasn't sure if she really wanted it, but she decided to apply anyway. She submitted her resume without expecting much. Her attitude was casual, she thought if she got accepted, great; if not, she wouldn't worry. Eventually, she was accepted and had to prepare to move to Illinois. At that point, she didn't realize how challenging this move would become.

In October 2019, she arrived in Illinois alone. "I took the taxi to the hostel. Nobody picked me up at the airport. I didn't know what to expect," she recalled. Her lack of preparation and guidance for life in Illinois became apparent almost immediately. "I didn't know I had to bring packet money—\$4,000. I only had \$1,000, and I struggled when I came up here." This marked the beginning of her adventure in a new, unfamiliar world, with challenges awaiting her at every turn.

She traveled alone and had no support when she arrived at the airport. She felt confused and uncertain because nobody was there to meet her. She was forced to manage everything by herself, starting with finding transportation. The lack of preparation quickly became obvious. She was unaware that she needed much more money than she brought. She expected \$1,000 would be enough, but later learned she needed \$4,000. Because of this misunderstanding, she faced immediate financial difficulties.

These show her vulnerability and the stress of moving abroad without proper guidance. It shows the importance of having clear information and support for teachers who move to new countries. Her struggles began right away, indicating that living abroad involves more than just professional changes. It also requires practical preparations and emotional readiness to handle unexpected situations.

Initiation: Facing Trials and Tribulations

Once in Illinois, her journey unfolded with a series of trials. Despite the initial setbacks, including moving between hostels and lacking financial support, she persevered. "I met people at the church, and through volunteering, I found a Filipino community and a place to stay," she shared. This connection was vital as she transitioned into life in the United States. The teacher faced many challenges upon arriving in Illinois. She experienced difficulties such as having to move frequently between different hostels. She also struggled because she did not have enough money to cover her initial expenses. Despite these hardships, she did not give up.

She found support by connecting with people at a local church. Through volunteering, she was able to meet fellow Filipinos who provided her with comfort and help. This community offered her a sense of belonging, which was crucial in her early days in the United States. The support from the Filipino community helped her find stable housing, reducing her stress and isolation.

This shows that building relationships and finding a supportive community can help overcome initial struggles

in a new country. Her perseverance and willingness to seek support played a major role in her ability to adapt to life in Illinois.

She began working as a Special Education (SPED) teacher in November 2019, a role she would grow into after experiencing more challenges. “I started as a SPED teacher, but by December, the assistant principal and other teachers left the school because they didn’t like the system,” she explained. The lack of orientation and support from the school, combined with a tough local environment, added to her struggle. “When it’s time to go home, you really have to leave quickly. It’s dangerous; if you walk alone on the street, you might get robbed,” she described. The harshness of her new surroundings was daunting. “The CTA bus smells of weed, and the ‘bloody red line’ train is dangerous with constant shootings and crimes.” She began her job in November 2019 but soon faced unexpected issues. By December, key staff like the assistant principal and several teachers had left. They resigned because they did not agree with the school’s management or environment. This sudden loss of colleagues meant that the teacher received even less support than before.

The lack of proper orientation and guidance from the school made her job harder. She felt unprepared and isolated. On top of these professional challenges, she also had to deal with serious safety issues in her local community. She described feeling unsafe after work because of the risk of robbery if walking alone. Her everyday experiences with public transportation added to her stress. She noted that the buses often smelled strongly of marijuana (“weed”), and the train line she used, which she called the “bloody red line,” frequently experienced shootings and violent crimes.

These clearly show the teacher faced a combination of professional challenges and personal dangers. Her struggles came from a lack of institutional support at work and serious safety concerns in her daily environment. These conditions made her transition to teaching in Illinois extremely tough and stressful.

Yet, her resilience saw her through. “I asked for money from friends who had been here before me. They lent me money, and when I got my salary, I was able to pay them back.” Despite the harsh environment, she found a sense of community and support within her colleagues at work. “The teachers here support each other. They’re willing to give advice and share strategies.” This explains how the teacher overcame her difficulties through determination. Initially, she faced financial struggles upon arriving in a new environment. To handle this, she turned to friends who had experienced similar challenges before. Her friends lent her money, allowing her to survive until she received her first salary. This act shows her practical approach to solving immediate problems and her resourcefulness during tough times.

Additionally, the teacher found emotional strength through the community at her workplace. She experienced a supportive atmosphere among colleagues, where teachers

willingly offered help. They shared practical advice and teaching strategies, making her adaptation smoother. This community helped reduce her sense of isolation and made her feel less alone in a difficult situation. Her experiences show her resilience and underline the importance of having both personal determination and community support when facing adversities.

She also faced cultural and professional integration issues, particularly related to her students’ behavior. “If you don’t have good behavior, how will you learn academically?” This challenge, a common issue for many overseas Filipino teachers, added another layer of difficulty to her teaching experience. This aligns with Chua (2021), who found that Filipino teachers often face profound cultural and behavioral difficulties in U.S. classrooms, particularly in managing student conduct and aligning teaching expectations. These statements show the struggles of the teacher in adapting to a new culture and teaching environment. She encountered problems related to integrating both culturally and professionally. One main issue was managing the behavior of her students. She believed that good behavior is important for effective learning. Without good classroom behavior, students would find it hard to focus on academic tasks.

This behavioral challenge was not unique to her alone. Many overseas Filipino teachers face similar difficulties when teaching abroad. It is common for these teachers to experience problems related to discipline in their classrooms. Dealing with student behavior problems complicates their teaching experience. It makes adapting to the new educational system even more challenging. The teacher’s experience illustrates how behavioral issues significantly impact teachers who move overseas.

Return: The Return with Gifts and Boons

After almost five years in Illinois, her experience as a teacher had transformed her. Despite the hardships she encountered at the beginning, she grew in her role and adapted to the culture. “I’ve never encountered a teacher here who isn’t supportive. They set aside their attitudes, and as long as you get along, everything works well,” she shared. By now, she had established a solid foundation, thanks to the support of her colleagues and her own perseverance. These show how the teacher’s experience in Illinois changed her in a positive way over time. At first, she faced many challenges, such as adjusting to a new place, working in a different school system, and being away from her family. These early hardships were difficult, but they helped her grow stronger. Over the years, she learned how to manage her responsibilities better and adapt to the culture around her.

The statement about her colleagues being supportive shows that the school environment played a big role in her adjustment. She appreciated how teachers put aside personal differences to help each other. This teamwork made her feel welcome and made her job easier. It also highlights the importance of having a strong support system when working in a foreign country. Finally, her

personal perseverance, her willingness to keep going despite difficulties, combined with the help from her peers, allowed her to build a stable and successful teaching life in Illinois.

Her return, in a sense, was not a physical one but an internal shift. “The challenges I faced—transportation, housing, language barriers, and student behavior—taught me a lot,” she reflected. She learned to navigate her new environment, building her own network and support system in the process. This statement shows that the teacher did not return to her home country, but she experienced a deep personal change. The “return” here means she became stronger and wiser after facing many challenges. These included problems with transportation, finding a place to live, adjusting to the language, and managing student behavior.

Through these hardships, she learned many life lessons. Instead of giving up, she adapted to her surroundings. She figured out how to solve problems on her own and slowly built a support system. This means she found people she could rely on, such as friends, co-teachers, or members of the Filipino community. Her experience shows growth. She was no longer the same person who first arrived in Illinois—she became more capable, independent, and resilient.

Her journey, once marked by uncertainty and struggle, ended with a sense of accomplishment. “I’ve finished five years working in Harvard, and I’ve never encountered a colleague who hasn’t helped me,” she said, proud of the connections she had made and the lessons she had learned. She had come from a place of confusion and adversity to a position where she not only adapted to her new life but thrived, gaining both professional experience and personal growth.

The statements describe a powerful story of transformation. At first, the teacher felt uncertain and struggled to adjust to her new environment. Moving to a new country, starting a different job, and facing many challenges made her journey difficult in the beginning. She experienced confusion and adversity, which means she had to deal with unfamiliar situations and emotional stress.

However, her experience changed over time. She proudly shared that she had worked for five years at Harvard, and during that time, she always received help from her colleagues. This shows that she was able to build strong, supportive relationships with the people around her. These connections played an important role in her success. Her sense of accomplishment came from both surviving and growing through the challenges. Professionally, she gained experience. Personally, she became stronger and more confident. Her story shows that even in hard situations, support from others and inner strength can lead to success and growth.

Participant 2

Departure: The Call to Adventure

The journey of Participant 2 began long before she left

the Philippines. A former teacher for Kindergarten to Grade 2, Cristelle always had a dream of experiencing life in America. “I’ve always wanted to be in America. I wanted to experience snow and live the American life.” This dream grew even more intense during her college days, where she pursued a degree in special education with the intention of working abroad. “It’s already my dream to be in America,” she said, reflecting on her deep-seated desire to provide a better life for her son and herself.

Participant 2 started not with her flight to Illinois, but with a lifelong dream. Even before she finished college, she had already imagined herself living in America. This dream was not simply about personal adventure. It was connected to her deeper hopes for a better life for her family, especially her son.

As a teacher of young children in the Philippines, Participant 2 had experience in education. But her dream pushed her further. She studied special education in college with the goal of one day working abroad. Her choice of course shows how serious and focused she was about turning her dream into reality. Her words, “I’ve always wanted to be in America,” reflect not just excitement, but commitment to a plan she had carried for years. Her journey shows how powerful dreams can guide a person’s life decisions, especially when these dreams are tied to family, opportunity, and self-improvement.

However, this ambition was not without its challenges. Her husband, a government employee in the Philippines, was initially hesitant to support her decision. “My husband was not okay with it because he was a government employee, but I told him, ‘Let’s think about our son. He deserves to experience what I didn’t.’” With that, her husband agreed, and she made the bold decision to leave her job in the Philippines and apply for any agency that could help her reach her dream. “I chose to quit my job in the Philippines and applied for any agency, even with so many expenses, just to go to the U.S. But I think it was God’s way,” she explained.

The desire to work in the United States was strong, but she faced an emotional barrier at home. Her husband, who worked in the Philippine government, was not supportive at first. This reaction was understandable because leaving the country for work abroad often means major changes for the whole family. There may be worries about separation, financial risk, and the uncertainties of adjusting to a new country. The participant had to convince her husband that this decision was not just for herself, but for the future of their child. She appealed to a deeper sense of purpose by saying, “Let’s think about our son.” This showed that her motivation was not purely personal, but rooted in a hope that her child could have a better life than she did.

Eventually, her husband agreed, and this marked a turning point. She left her stable job in the Philippines and took a financial risk by applying through any agency that could help her migrate. She did this despite knowing that there would be many costs involved, which is a common struggle for aspiring migrant workers. Her decision was

brave and driven by faith. She believed that everything happened for a reason and referred to her journey as “God’s way.” This shows how spiritual belief can be a source of strength when making life-changing decisions. It also reflects how Filipino migrant teachers often rely on both personal sacrifice and religious faith to pursue overseas opportunities.

Her desire to be in Chicago specifically was a dream come true. “It was my dream to go to Chicago back then,” she said. And so, with her family by her side, she set off for the United States to pursue a teaching career, knowing that the financial rewards would be higher than those in the Philippines. This reflects how personal dreams, and professional aspirations often intersect in the migration journey of Overseas Filipino Teachers. Her desire to be in Chicago was not just a casual thought, it was a long-held dream. For her, teaching in Chicago represented more than just a job opportunity. It symbolized the achievement of something she had hoped for over the years. When she said, “It was my dream to go to Chicago back then,” it showed how deeply rooted this aspiration was in her life.

She also acknowledged the importance of having her family with her as she pursued this dream. Migrating to another country can be difficult and overwhelming. But having her loved ones beside her gave her emotional strength. Their presence helped ease the stress of moving and adjusting to a new environment. Furthermore, her decision was practical as well. She was aware that teaching in the United States, especially in Chicago, would bring higher financial compensation than what she earned in the Philippines. This shows that her move was both a fulfillment of a personal dream and a strategic decision to improve her family’s financial situation.

Initiation: Facing Trials and Tribulations

Her initial experience in Illinois was a stark contrast to what she had imagined. “I thought that I could easily apply my teaching knowledge from the Philippines, that it would be easy now, that I didn’t need to study because I had mastered it in the Philippines.” However, upon arriving in Illinois, she realized the curriculum was entirely different from what she was accustomed to. “The curriculum here is not like in the Philippines. You teach a different lesson every day, unlike in the Philippines where if the students don’t understand, you can repeat the lesson the next day. Here, you only have one day to teach a lesson.” This difference made her realize that the teaching dynamics in Illinois posed unique challenges, leading her to feel that “there’s no quality education here,” as the fast-paced nature of the lessons didn’t allow for the depth she had been used to. Such experiences align with Chua’s (2021) findings that Filipino teachers often experience substantial cultural and educational adjustments when teaching abroad, encountering unexpected pedagogical differences and curricular pacing that significantly diverge from their previous experiences.

The teacher’s expectation that she could easily apply

her teaching experience from the Philippines reveals a common assumption held by many professionals moving to a new country. She believed that her years of practice and mastery would directly transfer to her new role in Illinois. However, this expectation was quickly challenged when she encountered a curriculum that was unfamiliar and structured in a completely different way. This realization brought her confusion and frustration, as her past teaching methods were no longer applicable in the same way.

The rigid structure of the Illinois curriculum, where each lesson is delivered only once and then immediately followed by a new topic, created a significant challenge for her. In the Philippines, she was used to adjusting the pace of her lessons to suit her students’ understanding, often repeating a lesson if needed. This flexibility ensured that students fully grasped the content before moving on. In contrast, the one-day-per-lesson rule in Illinois prevented her from providing the same level of support and reinforcement to her students, which she believed affected the quality of learning.

As a result of this fast-paced approach, she began to feel disillusioned about the educational system she had entered. She perceived that depth and mastery were sacrificed in favor of coverage and pacing. This caused her to question the quality of education being provided, especially when students were expected to keep up regardless of their level of understanding. These differences not only challenged her professionally but also emotionally, as she struggled to adjust to a teaching style that seemed to clash with her values and past experiences. This experience shows the deeper issue of educational mismatch and the difficulty of adapting to a foreign system that does not align with one’s teaching philosophy.

Despite these difficulties, Cristelle had her family to rely on. “I did not feel much challenge here because I have my family with me,” she said, acknowledging how their support helped her navigate her new environment. She began working with children from Kindergarten to Grade 3, a role that she would soon find both fulfilling and challenging. This support underscores the findings of Macapagong, Maguate, and Geroso (2023), who emphasize the importance of community and familial ties in helping Filipino teachers cope and adapt in foreign educational settings.

Having her family with her made a big difference in Cristelle’s experience as a teacher in Illinois. It gave her emotional stability and made her feel less alone. Living in a new country with different culture and work expectations can be overwhelming, but having loved ones nearby offered her comfort and motivation. This kind of support is especially important for overseas workers, as it helps ease feelings of homesickness and fear of the unknown.

Because her family was with her, Cristelle could focus more on her job and adjust to her new teaching environment. Teaching young children from Kindergarten to Grade 3 can be demanding, but her strong family support gave

her the strength to face these challenges. It allowed her to manage stress better and remain dedicated to her responsibilities. This shows how family plays a crucial role not only in emotional well-being but also in helping overseas workers stay grounded and perform well in their profession.

One of the greatest challenges she faced was with a new student who transferred from Wisconsin. “I have this student, a transferee from Wisconsin, who has autism and speech and language disorder. She is nonverbal, and I had no knowledge or experience handling children with autism who are nonverbal,” she admitted. Faced with this new challenge, she had to quickly adapt and find new ways to help her student learn. “I used pictures and videos as interactive applications to communicate with her,” she shared, reflecting on the creative solutions she found to bridge the communication gap.

The situation is a major professional challenge for the teacher: handling a student with complex needs without prior training. Teaching a nonverbal student with autism and a speech and language disorder requires specialized strategies, patience, and understanding. Because the teacher had no experience in this area, she was placed in a difficult position where she had to learn quickly on the job. This sudden responsibility have caused stress, uncertainty, and a feeling of being unprepared.

Despite the difficulty, the teacher responded with resourcefulness and a willingness to adjust. She explored alternative methods of communication, such as pictures and videos, to engage her student. This shows adaptability and a strong commitment to student learning. Rather than being discouraged by her limitations, she made efforts to find solutions. Her experience reflects how overseas teachers often face unfamiliar situations but rise to the challenge through creativity and empathy.

The case also reveals a broader issue in the support system. Teachers, especially those new to a school or country, should be provided with proper orientation, resources, or at least guidance when assigned to students with special needs. The absence of such support forces educators to take on more responsibility than expected. In this situation, the teacher’s efforts to adjust on her own show both the pressure and dedication involved in being an overseas Filipino teacher in a foreign system.

She also reached out to her colleagues for help, specifically the assistant principal, who was also the case manager. “I asked for help from our assistant principal, but she suggested just using pictures because the student might transfer to another class the following week,” she recalled. Despite the practical advice, the situation became complicated when the student’s parents became difficult to deal with. “Some parents here in the Southside are difficult. I asked the parents if they had a computer at home, and they complained to the principal, saying, ‘Why is this lady asking about our computer?’” She was taken aback by the parents’ reaction, but the assistant principal reassured her that her intentions were genuine. “The assistant principal told me not to worry about it.

She explained that I was just trying to help the child.” This situation became a test of her patience and ability to work through difficult professional relationships.

This situation reveals the complexities that teachers like her face when trying to support students with special needs in a foreign educational environment. Reaching out to a colleague, particularly someone in a leadership role like the assistant principal and case manager, reflects her willingness to seek help and collaborate. It shows that she is proactive in addressing her student’s needs, especially in a setting where she may not be fully familiar with available resources. However, the response she received—suggesting a temporary solution because the student might transfer soon, highlights the reality that not all problems are given long-term solutions. It also reflects how decisions in schools can be influenced by logistical factors like student mobility, which may lead to inconsistent interventions.

The conflict with the student’s parents further complicates her experience. Her question about a computer was likely intended to understand the student’s home environment and determine appropriate support strategies. However, the parents misunderstood her intention, resulting in a complaint. This incident demonstrates the delicate nature of parent-teacher communication, especially when cultural differences, assumptions, or lack of rapport are present. Her shock at their reaction reveals her unfamiliarity with the heightened sensitivity of some parents in that context.

The assistant principal’s reassurance was important in helping manage the emotional stress of the situation. It validated her efforts and helped prevent the incident from escalating further. However, this experience also tested her emotional resilience and professional maturity. Working in a new country, she must navigate not only student needs but also varying parental attitudes and institutional responses. This situation is how immigrant teachers must quickly learn to balance empathy, cultural sensitivity, and clear communication to maintain positive working relationships and continue supporting their students effectively.

Return: The Return with Gifts and Boons

After almost two years of teaching in Illinois, her journey has come full circle. She has faced many challenges, but her perseverance has paid off. Her journey was not just about surviving but about thriving, and she gained new skills that will benefit her throughout her career. “I’ve learned to adapt to the teaching style here, even if it’s different. I’ve learned to use technology and new strategies to help my students,” she said, reflecting on her growth as a teacher.

After almost two years of teaching in Illinois, the teacher experienced a journey of personal and professional transformation. At the start, she was met with unfamiliar systems, student behaviors, and teaching expectations that were different from what she was used to in the Philippines. These challenges tested her patience and

ability to cope. Despite these, she did not give up. Instead, she faced each situation with effort and determination. This persistence helped her adjust to the demands of teaching in a foreign setting.

Her journey shows that she did more than just manage to get by. She thrived in her new environment. Through daily classroom experiences, she developed new teaching strategies and learned how to use technology to support her lessons. She also became more flexible and open to change, realizing that being an effective teacher means being willing to grow. The skills she gained are not only useful in her current role but will also help her in future teaching positions. Her story is an example of how adversity can lead to strength and growth when faced with the right mindset and dedication.

Her ability to navigate the difficulties of adjusting to a new system has made her more resilient. “The school, colleagues, and administrators have been very supportive. They always ask me what I need, and our HR has visited us in school to check how we’re doing and offer advice,” she explained. This support network, both professional and personal, has been crucial in helping her adjust and excel in her role.

The teacher shows how important support systems are when facing a new and unfamiliar environment. Adjusting to a different education system can be overwhelming, especially when there are language barriers, cultural differences, and unfamiliar teaching practices. However, having people who consistently show concern and provide guidance can ease this process. The support she received from her school, colleagues, and administrators helped her feel more secure and valued. This encouraged her to stay motivated despite the difficulties.

Her growing resilience came from knowing she was not alone in her struggles. When people ask what you need, it shows empathy and understanding. These simple gestures make a big difference in helping someone adapt. It becomes easier to learn new systems and try new strategies when you know there are people around who are ready to help. This kind of environment builds confidence and helps teachers focus on their work without being burdened by fear or uncertainty. The teacher’s experience proves that resilience is not just built from facing hardship, it also comes from knowing that help is available and being willing to accept and learn from it.

She also acknowledged how her family played a vital part in her success. “Having my family with me made a big difference. They helped me stay grounded and motivated, and that made the challenges more manageable,” she shared. The presence of family in a foreign setting plays a powerful role in the emotional and mental well-being of an overseas worker. For this teacher, having her family with her in Illinois gave her a sense of stability during a time of great transition. When faced with unfamiliar environments, different teaching systems, and cultural adjustments, the emotional support provided by loved ones becomes a source of strength. It allowed her to remain focused on her goals and gave her comfort when

challenges became overwhelming.

Having her family close also helped reduce the feelings of homesickness and isolation that many overseas workers experience. This support system acted as a reminder of why she made the decision to leave her home country, to provide better opportunities and a more secure future for her loved ones. Their presence gave her daily motivation to persevere, even when the demands of teaching or cultural barriers felt too heavy. In essence, her family became both her anchor and her inspiration, helping her turn adversity into growth.

As she continues her work in Illinois, she has gained valuable experience and insights into handling diverse students and difficult situations. She has grown as a teacher and as a person, learning to navigate the cultural differences and challenges of living and working in a foreign country. “I now have the knowledge and experience to handle students with special needs, and I’ve become more patient with difficult situations,” she said, recognizing how far she has come since her initial arrival in Illinois.

As the teacher continues her work in Illinois, she has clearly undergone a process of personal and professional transformation. At the beginning of her journey, she faced many uncertainties, especially in dealing with students who had different needs from what she was used to. Over time, however, she has gained practical knowledge and skills. These experiences have helped her build confidence in her teaching abilities, especially when working with learners who require more attention and individualized support.

Her growth also reflects her adaptability to cultural differences. Living and working in a new country is not easy. She had to learn not only new teaching strategies but also how to interact with students, parents, and colleagues who come from different cultural backgrounds. These challenges helped her develop patience and emotional strength. The fact that she can now manage difficult classroom situations shows that she has matured as a teacher. She no longer feels lost or unprepared, and she can now rely on her own experiences to solve problems effectively. This journey has not only made her a better educator but also a more resilient and understanding person.

Her journey has equipped her with the tools and wisdom needed to continue on her path, and she carries with her the lessons learned from her experiences in Illinois—ready to give back to her community and the children she teaches. Her personal determination, familial support, institutional backing, and adaptive strategies illustrate both the rewards and challenges faced by Filipino teachers abroad, echoing broader themes identified by Bautista (2020), Alicamen and Becamon (2022), and Chua (2021).

Participant 3

Departure: The Call to Adventure

Participant 3’s journey began with a strong desire and “hunger for professional growth.” This mirrors the

motivations outlined by Uytico and Abadiano (2020), reflects the common goal among Filipino teachers pursuing opportunities overseas to achieve both professional and personal development. The notion of searching for “greener pastures” highlights the goal-driven attitudes identified in their grounded theory, emphasizing the significance of clear goals in successful adaptation abroad.

His story shows how a strong personal goal can become a powerful motivator for taking big life steps, such as moving to another country. His desire for professional growth pushed him to leave behind a familiar teaching environment in search of better opportunities. This shows that having a clear and strong reason for going abroad helps teachers stay focused even when they face hardships. His decision was not based on random chance, but on a deep need to improve himself and his career.

This mindset of aiming for “greener pastures” is common among Filipino teachers who work overseas. It reflects a practical way of thinking—if better pay, training, and teaching conditions are available elsewhere, they are willing to take the risk and start again in a new environment. Having a specific goal helps them endure the difficulties of adjusting to a new education system, culture, and way of life. It also gives them a sense of purpose, which becomes important when facing challenges like managing difficult student behaviors or feeling homesick. His goal-oriented mindset helped him grow both professionally and personally.

Driven by his ambition to enhance his skills as both a teacher and individual, he saw an opportunity to fulfill this goal in Illinois, motivated by the experiences of his friends who shared how “the professional growth over here is definitely overflowing and very enriching.” The teacher’s decision to move to Illinois was rooted in his personal desire for growth. He was not only thinking about improving his teaching skills but also about developing himself as a person. This kind of motivation shows that he was looking for more than just a job, he wanted an experience that could challenge and shape him. His ambition pushed him to step out of his comfort zone and explore new opportunities that could lead to long-term development.

His friends played a strong influence in his decision-making process. Hearing stories of success and professional satisfaction from people he trusted gave him the courage to take a risk. It shows how important social support and peer experiences are when making life-changing decisions. He did not decide blindly, he based his actions on the real experiences of others. This helped him believe that the rewards of moving abroad could be worth the challenges.

By aiming for a place where professional growth is said to be “overflowing,” he showed a proactive attitude toward learning. He was not content with staying in a place where opportunities were limited. Instead, he took the initiative to go where he believed he could learn more, do more, and become more. This kind of mindset is important

for teachers, especially when they seek continuous improvement and want to stay relevant in their profession. His journey reflects how ambition, peer influence, and the desire for self-betterment can come together to shape a major life decision.

Despite having spent “eight years in the Middle East,” where he met influential colleagues such as Mr. Jastoni, Participant 3 felt the pull towards what many might call a search for a “greener pasture.” Yet, his initial decision was somewhat uncertain, describing it as “like a trial and error when I applied over here.” Participant 3 had already accumulated significant teaching experience before coming to Illinois. Spending eight years in the Middle East gave him exposure to international teaching and built his confidence as an educator. It also provided him with professional connections, such as colleagues who later became part of his support network in the U.S. However, even with that background, he still felt the need to seek better opportunities. This desire for a “greener pasture” suggests that he was looking for more than just a job, it reflects his aspiration for growth, stability, and possibly a better quality of life.

His use of the phrase “trial and error” to describe his decision shows that he was not entirely sure about moving to the U.S. It reveals a sense of uncertainty and risk-taking. Although he was motivated by stories of professional growth from friends, he still doubted whether the move would be worth it or whether he would succeed. This mindset indicates that his journey was not entirely planned or confident but rather a leap of faith. It shows the internal conflict between hope and hesitation, which many migrant workers experience when making life-changing decisions.

Initiation: Facing Trials and Tribulations

Upon arriving in Illinois, Participant 3 quickly faced significant challenges. He vividly described his first year as “not a joke but it’s definitely a challenge,” with student behavior posing the greatest difficulty. This aligns with Chua’s (2021) findings about the profound cultural and behavioral challenges Filipino teachers experience in U.S. classrooms. His reliance on institutional and communal support—highlighted by the comfort provided by colleagues and administrators—mirrors the crucial role of supportive networks underscored by Bautista and Tamayo (2020) and Modesto (2020).

When Participant 3 arrived in Illinois, he encountered difficulties right away, especially with student behavior. This means that the classroom environment was different and more challenging than what he was used to. Managing student discipline became his biggest concern, making his first year emotionally and mentally exhausting. It was not just about teaching lessons; it was about controlling the classroom and understanding student behavior that he had never experienced before. These difficulties made him feel overwhelmed and unsure about continuing.

To cope with these challenges, Participant 3 depended heavily on support from the people around him.

His colleagues and school administrators provided encouragement, advice, and understanding. This kind of help was very important because it gave him the emotional strength to push through his struggles. Without this support system, it would have been harder for him to adjust and succeed. Support from fellow Filipino teachers also helped him feel that he was not alone in his experience. These relationships created a sense of belonging and comfort, helping him move forward despite the stress he felt in the classroom.

He found classroom management particularly overwhelming, reaching a point where he “was actually very down and tend of like giving up already because the behavior of the students definitely very crucial to manage.” The statement reveals the intense emotional toll that classroom management can have on a teacher, especially when student behavior is difficult to control. It shows that the participant experienced deep frustration and exhaustion. The overwhelming nature of the behavioral challenges pushed him to the edge of burnout. This highlights how student behavior can affect not only the learning environment but also the emotional well-being of teachers.

His experience also shows that managing disruptive behavior is not a simple task. It requires patience, skills, and support. When these are lacking or when the challenges become too frequent, it can lead to feelings of helplessness. The teacher’s desire to give up indicates how serious and consistent the behavioral problems were. It also reflects the gap between expectations and reality in teaching abroad. Teachers may come with the hope of professional growth, but they are met with unexpected difficulties that challenge their confidence.

This situation suggests the importance of strong support systems in schools. Without proper assistance, even experienced teachers may question their ability to continue. His story points to a need for more training on behavior management and emotional support for international teachers. It is a reminder that teaching in a new cultural setting brings both opportunity and hardship. When these hardships are not properly addressed, they can lead to emotional fatigue and decreased job satisfaction.

However, despite these hardships, he received exceptional support, noting, “the district, the principals, and the supervisors support you; it’s 100% that they gave you all the support.” Despite the many challenges he faced, the strong support system available to him made a significant difference. The presence of supportive district officials, principals, and supervisors created a safety net that allowed him to cope with the pressures of teaching in a foreign environment. This kind of institutional support can reduce feelings of isolation and frustration, especially for overseas teachers adjusting to a new system. Knowing that help is available encourages teachers to stay committed even when the work becomes overwhelming. This level of support also builds confidence in teachers. When leaders are approachable and responsive, teachers feel more secure and valued. It fosters a work environment

where collaboration and open communication are possible. This can help resolve issues faster, particularly those related to student behavior, cultural adjustments, and instructional concerns. Furthermore, such support shows that the school system recognizes the unique needs of overseas teachers and actively responds to them.

Support from school leadership also impacts job satisfaction and emotional well-being. It allows the teacher to focus more on instructional duties instead of being weighed down by administrative or personal challenges. This not only improves teacher performance but also benefits students through better learning experiences. Ultimately, the backing of supervisors and administrators plays a key role in helping overseas teachers succeed and thrive despite adversity.

Gradually, Participant 3 began adapting to his new environment, bolstered significantly by the presence of his family—“I did not feel the much challenge here in Illinois because I have my family with me.” Overcoming his initial fears and apprehensions about stepping out of his comfort zone, he found confidence and resilience, realizing that Filipino teachers are “definitely very flexible.” His experience highlights the crucial role of family in supporting overseas teachers during periods of transition and adjustment. Having his family with him served as a strong emotional anchor. This helped reduce the feelings of loneliness and homesickness that many teachers experience when working abroad. With their presence, he was able to stay focused on his responsibilities without the burden of worrying too much about the loved ones he left behind. Emotional stability at home positively influenced his professional performance in the workplace.

His ability to gradually adapt also reflects the importance of mindset when entering a new environment. Initially, he had fears about leaving his comfort zone, especially in facing an unfamiliar educational system. However, by allowing himself time and space to adjust, he eventually gained the confidence to take on more responsibilities and even support his peers. His acknowledgment of the flexibility of Filipino teachers shows a strong belief in their capacity to thrive in various contexts. It demonstrates how cultural traits such as adaptability and perseverance are key factors in overcoming challenges abroad. In time, he embraced his new role and grew into it with resilience and optimism.

Over four years, he deeply immersed himself in understanding the educational system, curriculum, and processes, eventually becoming “kind of like tagged as the assistant DOA.” His principal entrusted him fully to “mentor my fellow teachers,” signaling a crucial turning point in his journey.

Over the span of four years, the teacher showed a strong commitment to learning and adapting to the American educational system. He took the time to study not just what to teach, but also how the system works, including its curriculum, classroom processes, and standards. This level of immersion indicates a deep dedication to

professional growth. It also shows that he did not settle for simply surviving in a new environment—he aimed to understand it fully so he could function effectively within it. Being recognized as “kind of like the assistant DOA” reflects the level of trust and respect he earned from his school leadership. It also suggests that he was no longer seen as just a foreign teacher trying to adapt, but as someone who had become an integral part of the school’s system. His principal’s decision to entrust him with mentoring other teachers marks a significant shift in his role—from learner to leader. This turning point not only shows his success in overcoming initial adversities, but also highlights his transformation into someone capable of guiding others through the same journey.

Participant 3 faced additional trials, notably the harsh weather, which he humorously described as “still killing me over here,” and significant classroom challenges, especially with special education (SPED) students integrated into mainstream classes. Participant 3 experienced multiple layers of adversity that went beyond the classroom. One of the environmental challenges he faced was adjusting to the harsh weather conditions in Illinois. Coming from a tropical country, the extreme cold and unpredictable climate in the U.S. posed a physical and emotional strain. The cold weather, which he referred to in a light-hearted way, actually reflects a deeper difficulty in adapting to a new living environment. Weather may seem like a minor issue, but for many immigrants, it affects energy levels, health, and overall comfort. It adds another layer of stress that can affect daily routines and productivity.

Inside the classroom, Participant 3 encountered more serious challenges. One of the most pressing was dealing with special education (SPED) students placed in mainstream classes. This setup requires teachers to meet a wide range of student needs within one classroom, which can be overwhelming. Without enough training or adequate support, managing behavioral and learning differences becomes difficult. These situations often lead to stress, frustration, and even burnout. For Participant 3, it meant constantly adapting his teaching strategies, balancing academic goals with behavioral interventions, and trying to create a learning environment that suits everyone. This reflects the demand for inclusive teaching skills and proper resources, which may not always be readily available to immigrant teachers.

His experiences with students having ADHD, autism, and speech delays added complexity to his daily responsibilities, causing him occasional frustration—“there will be times that I have to be angry.” Yet, even amidst these trials, he received strong institutional backing through intervention specialists, illustrating the supportive network he valued deeply. The teacher’s experience with students who have ADHD, autism, and speech delays highlights the complexity of his teaching role. These conditions require specialized knowledge, patience, and effective classroom management skills. Without adequate preparation or training, handling such a diverse group

can be overwhelming. Each student has unique needs, and addressing them all at once can stretch a teacher’s capacity. This often results in emotional fatigue, which may explain why the teacher admitted that there were times when he had to raise his voice or show frustration. His statement shows that while he is passionate about teaching, the constant pressure from these challenges can take a toll on his patience and well-being.

However, what made his situation more manageable was the strong support system within his school. The presence of intervention specialists gave him the reassurance that he was not alone in addressing behavioral or learning difficulties. These specialists likely provided guidance, stepped in during tough situations, or offered strategies that helped ease his workload. This institutional support helped him cope with the stress and made him feel valued as a professional. It also reflects how critical a collaborative work environment is, especially for teachers handling special education students. Overall, while his role was demanding, the backing from his school allowed him to persist and grow professionally despite the everyday difficulties he faced.

Furthermore, Participant 3 highlighted the importance of community, often hosting fellow J1 teachers struggling with homesickness: “Mr. can I go to your house let’s just cook,” to which he warmly responded, “yeah you are all welcome here.” He emphasized that having a strong community or family was critical, providing emotional resilience and the ability to cope with loneliness.

Living and working in a foreign country far from family can lead to feelings of isolation and homesickness. For many, these emotional challenges can be just as difficult as professional ones. Participant 3 recognized this and created a space where fellow teachers could feel safe and welcome. By inviting others to his home and sharing meals, he helped reduce their loneliness and made them feel they were not alone.

This gesture reflects the cultural value of *bayanihan*, where people help one another in times of need. In a foreign land, building a sense of community becomes a vital coping strategy. It does not only provide comfort but also strengthens the mental and emotional well-being of individuals. Participant 3 understood that beyond academic and professional adjustments, emotional support plays a key role in surviving and thriving abroad. His actions created a support system that helped fellow teachers manage stress and maintain their sense of belonging, proving that emotional resilience grows stronger when people support each other.

Return: The Return with Gifts and Boons

Now in his fourth year, Participant 3 stands transformed by his journey. His gained insights and experiences have empowered him to confidently mentor other teachers, spearhead clubs, and create extra-curricular activities to inspire student engagement and foster a love for learning. He states clearly that, “Right now, I’m just so confident with everything.” He has overcome the

initial cultural shock and successfully integrated into the educational and social fabric of Illinois, offering his heart and full commitment to his students. This progression from uncertainty to confidence parallels the “impact” and “fundamentals” themes articulated by Alicamen and Becamon (2022), who noted that overseas teaching significantly enhances educators’ professional competencies and personal resilience.

His transformation in his fourth year of teaching in Illinois reveals a deep level of personal and professional growth. At the start, he faced many uncertainties and challenges, especially in dealing with unfamiliar student behavior and adjusting to a new educational environment. These initial struggles were emotionally and mentally draining. However, with time, support, and perseverance, he learned how to adapt to the system and gained confidence in his teaching abilities.

Now, he not only manages his classroom well but also extends his influence beyond it. By mentoring other teachers, he shares the lessons he learned from his own journey. His leadership in forming clubs and organizing extra-curricular activities shows that he has developed a broader understanding of how to engage students beyond academic tasks. These actions show his dedication to making learning enjoyable and meaningful. His experience highlights how overcoming adversity in a foreign setting can lead to a stronger sense of purpose and effectiveness as an educator.

His full integration into both the educational system and the community is another sign of his growth. From being uncertain and overwhelmed, he has become a confident teacher who knows how to navigate the system and support others. His journey shows how important time, support, and inner motivation are in helping overseas teachers succeed in a foreign teaching environment.

Participant 3’s ability to mentor fellow teachers and actively foster student engagement through clubs and extracurricular activities exemplifies the kind of professional growth and positive influence that Modesto (2020) described among Filipino immigrant teachers. His journey, marked by overcoming substantial trials, now allows him to serve as a beacon of guidance and support to fellow teachers and his students alike, returning metaphorically with gifts of knowledge, resilience, community spirit, and an unwavering passion for teaching.

Participant 4

Departure: The Call to Adventure

Participant 4 began her journey deeply rooted in her commitment and passion for special education. Before coming to Illinois, she worked as a special education teacher at the IDEAS Intellectual Development for Early Age School in Talisay City, Cebu, where she taught “15 kids diagnosed with some Down Syndrome, intellectual disability, and ADHD.” Her story reveals a strong foundation in her passion and dedication to teaching children with special needs. Her experience in the Philippines, specifically in a special education school,

shows that she was not new to working with diverse learners. Handling children with Down Syndrome, intellectual disabilities, and ADHD requires patience, understanding, and specific teaching strategies. This suggests that even before going abroad, she had already developed a deep sense of responsibility and empathy for learners with unique needs.

Her decision to move to Illinois reflects a desire to expand her professional practice and apply her skills in a more challenging, perhaps more rewarding, environment. It also shows her openness to growth and learning in a different cultural and educational setting. However, it is important to understand that while her background prepared her to some extent, the shift from the Philippines to Illinois still posed challenges that tested her resilience. The statement also reflects the depth of her calling, as not all educators are willing to commit to special education, which requires a higher level of emotional and physical dedication. This kind of beginning demonstrates that Participant 4 did not enter the field for convenience but out of a sincere commitment to make a difference in the lives of children with special needs.

Her experiences in the Philippines significantly shaped her motivation, stating, “My experience of being a teacher in Philippines inspires me to teach here,” especially since she had already worked in “self-contained or cluster settings.” The teacher’s experiences in the Philippines helped build her confidence to teach in a foreign country. Her background in self-contained or cluster settings meant she was already familiar with handling students who required more focused attention. This kind of teaching experience requires patience, structure, and strong classroom management skills. Because of this, she felt more prepared to face the challenges of teaching in the United States, especially in special education.

Her past experiences also gave her a sense of purpose. Teaching children with special needs in the Philippines helped her understand their unique learning styles and behaviors. This developed her empathy and resilience, two qualities that became essential when she transitioned to the U.S. education system. Even if the environment in Illinois was new and more demanding, her prior work in similar classroom setups allowed her to adjust more easily and gave her the motivation to keep going despite difficulties.

Discovering opportunities abroad through LinkedIn, her first attempt was to apply in London, but she faced a barrier, noting, “I have no Master Degree so I decided to take master degree for more knowledge about education because I really love teaching kids with special needs especially when I see the progress on them.”

The participant’s experience highlights how digital platforms like LinkedIn have become vital tools for discovering global opportunities. Her use of LinkedIn to search for teaching jobs abroad shows a proactive approach to career advancement. It reflects the increasing trend among Filipino educators to explore international opportunities as a way to grow professionally and improve

their family's quality of life. The platform provided her with access to job postings beyond the Philippines, allowing her to consider destinations like London.

However, her journey was not without challenges. Her attempt to apply in London was hindered by a common institutional requirement, a master's degree. This obstacle did not discourage her. Instead, she saw it as a motivation to continue her education. Her decision to pursue a master's degree shows her strong commitment to professional growth. It also reveals her deep passion for teaching children with special needs. Rather than seeing the lack of a graduate degree as a failure, she used it as an opportunity to enhance her skills. Her love for seeing progress in children became her inspiration to improve herself. This situation demonstrates her dedication, resilience, and willingness to overcome barriers to fulfill both her passion and her goals.

Initiation: Facing Trials and Tribulations

Upon arrival in Illinois, Participant 4 quickly realized that teaching there differed significantly from her experiences in the Philippines, especially regarding student discipline. She noted, "Teaching here is really different from the Philippines, the students here they lack little bit discipline when it comes to respecting teachers, unlike we bow down teachers." This echoes the findings by Chua (2021) regarding the cultural and behavioral challenges faced by Filipino teachers working in U.S. classrooms. Participant 4 experienced a cultural adjustment upon starting her teaching job in Illinois. One of the major differences she noticed was the lack of discipline among students. Compared to her teaching experience in the Philippines, where students often show respect by bowing or using polite language, the behavior of students in Illinois came as a surprise. This made classroom management more difficult for her because the behavior she expected and was used to was not present in her new environment.

This cultural gap affected her ability to establish authority and build a structured classroom routine. She had to shift her strategies and expectations, realizing that what worked in the Philippines might not work in Illinois. Adjusting to a new cultural context meant she had to learn new ways to gain respect, manage behavior, and connect with students. This added stress to her teaching responsibilities, especially since behavior management is a key part of effective learning.

The lack of discipline also made it harder for her to focus on instruction. When students are frequently disruptive or resistant to classroom rules, it limits the teacher's ability to deliver lessons effectively. This can lead to frustration, especially for someone used to a more respectful classroom culture.

Her teaching role became particularly challenging, as she was a "self-contained teacher of first grade and kindergarten," handling students with autism spectrum disorder, learning disabilities, and ADHD. Being a self-contained teacher means that she was fully responsible for a class of students who required specialized attention

throughout the day. Unlike a general education setting where students may move between teachers or receive support from multiple educators, a self-contained classroom places the full responsibility for instruction, behavior management, and individual support on one teacher. This setup can be overwhelming, especially when dealing with students who have complex needs such as autism, learning disabilities, and ADHD.

Teaching first grade and kindergarten in this setting adds another layer of difficulty. At this age, students are still developing basic academic, social, and behavioral skills. When those students also have special needs, the teacher must find creative and flexible ways to support their learning while managing behavioral challenges. This requires not only patience but also knowledge of different strategies and interventions that match each child's needs. Handling students with autism means that the teacher needs to create a structured and predictable environment, use visual aids, and provide clear instructions. For students with learning disabilities, lessons must be simplified and repeated, often using hands-on materials. Those with ADHD may struggle to stay focused or follow routines, requiring constant redirection and behavior support. Managing all of these differences in one classroom can lead to stress and fatigue, especially when support from aides or other staff is limited.

The behavioral challenges were profound; students would often "stand up and just roam around the classroom," and managing such behaviors was exhausting, with some students "starting to running around and shout and screaming because they want playtime." The behavioral challenges faced by the teachers were intense and demanding. When students would stand up and roam around the classroom, it disrupted the flow of lessons and made it difficult for the teacher to maintain order. This kind of behavior indicated a lack of focus and control, which greatly affected the learning environment. It also placed a heavy burden on the teacher, who had to constantly remind students of classroom rules and expectations instead of focusing on instruction.

Managing such behavior day after day was emotionally and physically draining. When students began shouting, screaming, and running around, it not only distracted other learners but also created a chaotic atmosphere that could lead to safety concerns. These behaviors suggested that some students might have unmet emotional or psychological needs, or they may not have been taught appropriate school behavior at home. Teachers had to find ways to redirect these behaviors while still trying to meet the academic goals of the day. This often required extra effort, patience, and creativity on the teacher's part. The exhaustion came not just from handling one child but often multiple children showing these behaviors at the same time. The teacher had to juggle different needs, apply different strategies, and remain calm throughout the day. This kind of work can lead to burnout, especially when there is a lack of support staff or when the teacher feels unprepared to handle such intense behavioral issues.

These behavioral challenges made teaching more difficult, requiring teachers to go beyond their usual responsibilities to ensure learning could still take place.

Her trials escalated the previous year when she taught second and third graders in a self-contained classroom. One particularly challenging student named Liam, diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, exhibited severe behavioral issues, regularly expressing aggression, stating, “I want to kill.” The teacher’s experience with second and third graders in a self-contained classroom brought her face-to-face with heightened professional challenges. Teaching in a self-contained setup already requires a high level of patience, skill, and emotional strength, as these classrooms often cater to students with a wide range of special needs. Managing multiple behavioral and learning issues at once is demanding. It places the teacher in a position where she must constantly shift between instructional duties and behavioral interventions, all while trying to maintain a calm and structured environment. This kind of teaching setup lead to emotional fatigue, especially when adequate support systems or personnel are limited.

The situation became more difficult when she had to manage a student like Liam, whose behavioral expressions were severe and potentially dangerous. A statement like “I want to kill” is not only alarming but can also cause anxiety and fear within the classroom setting, for both the teacher and the other students. This type of behavior demands immediate attention and specialized intervention, which not all general or even SPED teachers are trained for. It also tests the emotional resilience of the teacher, who must remain calm, professional, and compassionate while addressing the behavior safely. Such experiences can lead to increased stress, a sense of helplessness, and burnout, especially if the teacher does not receive timely support from behavior specialists or school administrators. This case highlights the critical need for behavioral support teams, regular training on handling aggressive behaviors, and strong institutional backing to ensure the safety and well-being of both teachers and students.

Participant 4 acknowledged the exhausting nature of her role, recognizing why “many locals they’re not able to handle it because many teachers there like only teachers for five months or six months.” Despite this, she persevered, demonstrating resilience that earned her the trust and reliance of her colleagues and administration, who encouraged her to stay, expressing clearly that they valued her presence greatly: “they’re holding me like no don’t go anywhere.” Her experience shows the intense physical and emotional demands of teaching in a self-contained classroom in Illinois. She observed that many local teachers struggle to cope with the pressures of the job, often resigning within a few months. This reveals how taxing the environment can be, especially when dealing with students who have special needs and behavioral issues. It also shows the high turnover rate in such roles, indicating that these positions require exceptional patience, commitment, and emotional strength.

Despite the overwhelming nature of her work, Participant 4 chose to stay. Her decision to remain in her role demonstrates strong perseverance and dedication to her students. Instead of giving in to burnout, she continued to fulfill her responsibilities. Her consistent presence in the classroom and her ability to manage difficult situations built trust among her colleagues and administrators. They recognized her value and made efforts to retain her, which shows that her resilience not only benefited her students but also positively influenced her working relationships. Her story is about the importance of emotional endurance and the impact it can have on professional recognition and workplace support.

Participant 4 addressed the core issue of student behavior by engaging proactively with parents, using communication tools such as the “app called Remind,” maintaining regular contact despite privacy limitations. She emphasized the challenges related to attendance, reminding parents that “absence and early dismissal is really like an impact like to be a teacher because students are not that excited in your class.”

This statement reflects the intense physical and emotional demands of being a teacher in a self-contained classroom, particularly when handling students with special needs. The fact that many local teachers reportedly leave after only a few months suggests a high turnover rate, likely due to burnout or lack of preparation for such a challenging teaching environment. This implies that the role requires more than just teaching skills; it demands emotional strength, patience, and endurance. Her recognition of this pattern shows awareness of how difficult the position can be for many educators, regardless of their background or training.

Despite these challenges, Participant 4 chose to remain in her position. This decision demonstrates her resilience and strong commitment to her profession. Her ability to stay when others could not suggests she possesses a high level of emotional stability and motivation. It also reveals her adaptability in managing not only students’ behaviors but also the demands of the system around her. The recognition and encouragement she received from colleagues and administrators validate her efforts and contributions. It indicates that her work is not only seen but deeply appreciated, which may serve as a critical factor in her continued motivation. The trust placed in her highlights how essential she has become within her school community, a mark of both her capability and perseverance.

To encourage positive behaviors, she implemented reward systems, noting the importance of “Behavior reward” and strategies like tally marks and stickers to support and motivate students like Adrian, who “manifest a difficulty in focusing but he knows his behavior very well.” The teacher used a reward system to encourage positive behavior among her students. By giving out stickers and tally marks, she provided a clear and simple way for students to understand what behaviors were expected and which actions would be recognized. This method

helps create structure in the classroom. It gives students a goal to work toward, which can improve their motivation to behave properly and stay on task.

For students like Adrian, who have difficulty focusing but are aware of their behavior, this kind of system is especially helpful. It gives immediate feedback and reinforcement, which support his self-regulation. Since Adrian knows how he behaves but struggles with concentration, the reward system acts as a consistent reminder and motivator. It shifts the focus from punishment to encouragement. This approach also builds a positive learning environment where students feel seen and supported, rather than judged.

In addition, using visible tools like tally marks makes progress easier to track, both for the student and the teacher. It allows the teacher to monitor behavior patterns and adjust strategies if needed. Over time, such systems can help develop intrinsic motivation, as students begin to associate good behavior with a sense of accomplishment and recognition. These strategies promote responsibility, focus, and classroom cooperation.

The support she received from her school community was vital. Participant 4 highlighted that her school administration and colleagues were highly supportive, stating, “the school, the colleagues, and the principals said if you need anything just call me.” This aligns with Modesto’s (2020) findings emphasizing the importance of supportive networks in helping teachers adapt and thrive professionally. The support that Participant 4 received from her school community played a very important role in her adjustment as a teacher in Illinois. Being in a new country with a different culture, she faced many challenges, especially in managing student behavior and adapting to a different classroom environment. Having a supportive school community helped lessen the stress and made her feel that she was not alone in facing these struggles. The presence of colleagues and administrators who were approachable and ready to help gave her a sense of security and motivation to keep going.

Support from school leaders and peers also helped her build confidence in her new role. When teachers know they can ask for help and receive it, they become more open to learning and adjusting. It allows them to focus on their responsibilities without feeling overwhelmed. For Participant 4, knowing that her school was ready to listen and respond to her needs allowed her to stay committed to her job despite the challenges. This support system also helped her continue delivering quality teaching even in a difficult classroom setting.

Furthermore, having a strong school community helps promote emotional well-being. Being far from home and working with special needs students can be emotionally exhausting. The support she received likely helped prevent feelings of isolation or burnout. It also contributed to her professional growth, as supportive environments create opportunities for learning from others. In the case of Participant 4, this kind of school culture helped her remain strong, dedicated, and able to meet her students’

needs, even during difficult moments.

She also valued practical support such as ample preparation time and resources, explaining, “we have one-hour preparation time and one-hour lunchtime,” which significantly eased her workload and enabled her to plan effectively. The teacher appreciated the value of having enough preparation time during her workday. This allowed her to focus on organizing her lessons, preparing instructional materials, and reflecting on how to improve her teaching strategies. When teachers are given time to prepare, they are better able to address the individual needs of their students and manage their classrooms effectively. It also helps reduce stress because they are not constantly rushing to meet daily demands.

Having a full hour for lunch also contributed to her sense of balance and well-being. This break gave her the chance to rest, regain energy, and mentally recharge before continuing with her teaching duties. A well-timed lunch break can improve focus and performance in the classroom, especially for teachers handling students with special needs or behavioral challenges. The availability of both preparation time and rest periods shows how essential practical support is in helping teachers do their work well and maintain their emotional and physical health.

Return: The Return with Gifts and Boons

Through these rigorous experiences, Participant 4 evolved considerably. She gained invaluable insights and practical strategies in managing challenging student behaviors, utilizing communication effectively with parents, and navigating institutional resources for support. Her journey aligns with Alicamen and Becamon (2022), underscoring how overseas experiences significantly enhance educators’ professional, personal, and financial growth. Her journey equipped her with a profound depth of patience, adaptability, and innovative teaching strategies that she can bring back and share with her home community. Her experiences underscore the power of resilience and community support in transforming educational practices, allowing her to return, symbolically, with enhanced skills, deeper empathy, and a heightened commitment to special education.

Her journey as an overseas teacher deeply transformed her approach to education. Faced with constant behavioral challenges in the classroom, she was pushed to develop creative and practical strategies to maintain order and support student learning. These challenges helped her grow more patient and flexible, qualities that are essential in special education. Her experience also sharpened her ability to handle difficult situations calmly and thoughtfully.

Communication with parents became another critical area of growth. Participant 4 learned how to navigate sensitive conversations, especially with families who may not always understand or support the teacher’s strategies. Through trial and error, she developed more effective ways to build trust and encourage parent cooperation.

In addition, she became more skilled in identifying and using institutional resources to help both herself and her students succeed. These experiences gave her the confidence and independence to seek help when needed and to advocate for her classroom's needs.

Her time in Illinois also strengthened her sense of community. She realized that teaching is not a solitary role but one that thrives on teamwork and shared goals. Support from colleagues, mentors, and administrators played a key role in helping her stay motivated and successful. This sense of belonging helped her become not only a better teacher but also a more compassionate and resilient individual.

All of these experiences have lasting value. Participant 4 gained skills and insights that go beyond the classroom. If she returns to her home country, she will bring with her a renewed commitment to special education. She is now equipped with a wider set of teaching tools, a deeper understanding of diverse learners, and a strong desire to make a difference in her local community. Her journey shows that even difficult experiences can lead to growth, transformation, and a stronger passion for teaching.

Participant 5

Departure: The Call to Adventure

Participant 5 began her journey after spending "10 years teaching in the Philippines," specifically at LaSalle University, a private school. She had a strong foundation in teaching before moving to the United States. She worked for ten years in a private school in the Philippines, which means she had a lot of experience and skills in classroom teaching. Teaching in a private institution like LaSalle University likely gave her exposure to structured lesson plans, professional development activities, and a clear set of school expectations. This background helped build her confidence as an educator and prepared her for challenges in the classroom. However, even with a decade of teaching experience, moving to a new country meant facing a completely different system. The teaching environment in Illinois would be different in terms of student behavior, curriculum, school culture, and expectations. Her long teaching history in the Philippines have given her the basic tools to teach, but it did not remove the need to adapt and learn new methods. This highlights that professional experience is important, but cultural and system-related adjustments still require time and effort. Despite her extensive teaching experience, she grappled with substantial financial struggles, feeling deeply affected as a mother unable to fully provide for her son's needs. The story reflects a common reality among many Overseas Filipino Teachers. Even with ten years of teaching experience in the Philippines, she still faced financial limitations. This shows how teaching, especially in private institutions, often does not offer sufficient compensation to support a family. Her experience underlines the gap between professional dedication and financial stability in the local context.

Her emotional burden as a mother further deepens the

complexity of her decision to work abroad. The inability to meet her son's needs created a sense of guilt, even though her son was understanding. This emotional struggle became a strong motivation for her to seek better opportunities overseas. It highlights how family responsibilities often push professionals to make life-changing decisions, such as leaving the country. Her journey was not just about career advancement but also about fulfilling her role as a provider and parent.

She poignantly expressed, "I was guilty because I can't give what he deserves, he didn't complain," which intensified her resolve. A defining moment came when her son reversed roles, offering his allowance to her, this emotional exchange served as "the twist to grab the opportunity from Chicago." This statement reflects a deeply emotional experience for the teacher. As a mother, she carried a heavy burden of guilt for not being able to provide adequately for her child. Her sense of responsibility went beyond basic needs—she wanted to give her son the life he truly deserved. The fact that her son never complained only made her feel more emotional. Her quiet understanding and patience increased her sense of personal failure, even though she was doing her best. This guilt became a strong motivator. It pushed her to look for opportunities that would allow her to improve their life, even if it meant making difficult decisions.

The moment her son offered his allowance to her became a powerful turning point. This act of selflessness from a child reversed the usual roles of parent and child. It made her realize how mature and understanding her son was, and how deeply their situation affected both of them. This emotional twist gave her the final push to pursue a teaching job in Chicago. She understood that this was more than just a career move—it was a chance to change their future. The gesture from her son was not only touching but also transformative. It helped her shift from hesitation to determination, guiding her to take a leap of faith despite the uncertainties ahead.

Encouraged by a colleague already teaching in Chicago who shared that "there's a lot of special education opportunities here," Participant 5 made the decisive leap, primarily driven by her son's support. Her decision to work abroad was not made in isolation. She was strongly influenced by the experience and encouragement of a colleague who had already found a teaching opportunity in Chicago. Hearing firsthand that there were many openings in special education gave her a clearer picture of the possibilities and boosted her confidence. This form of peer encouragement played a significant role in shaping her decision. It showed her that the move was not just a dream but something achievable and within reach. More importantly, her son's support was the emotional fuel behind her leap. As a mother, she wanted to provide a better life for her child, and knowing that her son understood and stood by her gave her the strength to face the uncertainties ahead. His understanding reduced her guilt and reinforced her sense of purpose. It gave meaning to her sacrifices and reminded her that the

decision to move was not only for her career growth but also for the future of her family. The combination of professional insight from a colleague and personal motivation from her son made her choice both practical and deeply emotional.

Initiation: Facing Trials and Tribulations

Upon her arrival in Illinois, Participant 5 faced immediate and unexpected cultural and situational challenges. This echoed the “culture shock” and “immersion” themes described by Uytico and Abadiano (2020) and Alicamen and Becamon (2022). Although she prepared mentally, recognizing that “the culture here is really different,” she was nonetheless shocked upon discovering her school’s location within a predominantly black community, confessing, “I failed to research the address. I was shocked because it’s really like black community.” Nonetheless, she adopted a resilient attitude, embracing the challenge with the mindset of “come what may.”

Participant 5 experienced an abrupt confrontation with cultural reality when she arrived in Illinois. Although she tried to prepare herself mentally for life abroad, she was still unprepared for the actual environment she encountered. Her surprise upon discovering the community’s demographic makeup revealed a gap between her expectations and the reality of her placement. This situation reflects a classic example of cultural disorientation, where what one has imagined or prepared for does not match the lived experience.

The lack of prior research into her new environment also suggests a practical oversight, which amplified her cultural shock. The unfamiliar setting not only challenged her sense of comfort but also triggered a need for immediate emotional adjustment. Despite the initial discomfort, Participant 5 did not retreat or complain excessively. Instead, she chose to face the challenge with a mindset of openness and acceptance. Her “come what may” attitude became her internal coping mechanism, allowing her to navigate the situation with courage and emotional flexibility.

This resilient outlook shows her ability to adapt, even when caught off guard. It also shows the importance of mindset in overcoming unexpected adversities. While the unfamiliar cultural setting posed a challenge, her willingness to stay grounded and find her way forward highlights her personal strength and determination to succeed in her teaching role abroad.

The reality of her role as a “diverse learner teacher” and a “resource teacher in SPED” quickly became apparent as she confronted significant behavioral issues among students. She detailed how the school’s instructional focus leaned heavily on addressing behavior and trauma rather than purely academics, reflecting that “instructions and pressure situation in my learning” were largely centered on managing behavioral challenges rather than rigorous academic instruction.

The teacher’s role as a “diverse learner teacher” and a “resource teacher in SPED” exposed her to the realities

of teaching students with a wide range of learning and behavioral needs. In this setting, she had to shift her focus from traditional academic instruction to managing the emotional and behavioral concerns of her students. This meant that teaching was no longer just about delivering lessons or completing the curriculum. Instead, much of her effort went into ensuring that students were emotionally stable and well-behaved enough to participate in learning.

This shift in focus suggests that behavior and trauma were at the center of her daily teaching responsibilities. Instead of spending most of her time developing academic content or teaching complex concepts, she found herself responding to outbursts, calming anxious students, and managing classroom disruptions. This experience reveals how the role of a SPED teacher in a diverse setting can differ greatly from general classroom teaching. Academic achievement often becomes secondary to emotional regulation and social development.

Additionally, the pressure she felt was not related to student performance on tests or covering a specific number of lessons. The pressure was more about how to support students who come from difficult backgrounds or who have emotional or developmental needs. It highlights how challenging it is to balance the need for academic progress while addressing the deeper, often hidden, issues students face. The role demanded patience, empathy, and creativity, traits that go beyond academic qualifications. The teacher had to adapt quickly, showing resilience and care, while still trying to meet educational standards under challenging conditions.

The persistent behavioral issues among students posed continuous obstacles, requiring Participant 5 to “build rapport, build relationship with those kids,” which significantly redirected her priorities away from purely educational outcomes. Her struggle was to convey to students the necessity of academics, asserting, “we have to go to the academic side it’s not just about having fun, it’s not just all about making your behaviour better, but we have to learn also.”

Participant 5 encountered persistent behavioral issues in her classroom, which greatly affected how she approached teaching. Instead of focusing solely on academic goals, she had to prioritize building trust and emotional connections with her students. She realized that without first establishing a positive relationship, students would not be open to learning. This redirection of her priorities shows how behavior management became more urgent than delivering academic lessons.

Because of the students’ behavior, she had to put extra effort into explaining the value of education. She struggled to make students understand that while managing behavior is important, learning academic skills is equally essential. This means that her teaching was no longer just about covering lessons but also about constantly motivating students to take their studies seriously. Her experience reflects the challenge of balancing emotional support with academic instruction, especially in an environment

where students have complex behavioral needs. Despite these trials, Participant 5 received critical support from her administration. Her case manager notably clarified her responsibilities, offering encouragement with the empowering message: “it’s not your work to change their behavior, it’s not your work to make a magic and change them, your work is to service them with academics.” This clear delineation of duties significantly relieved her of the undue pressure. The support extended beyond emotional reassurance; practical measures such as Professional Development Sessions (PDS) were provided by her principal, who actively encouraged her participation. Participant 5 expressed profound gratitude for this backing, noting the absence of micromanagement and clear communication from her supportive case manager.

Participant 5 experienced many challenges in her new teaching environment, particularly in managing student behavior. However, the support she received from her administration played a key role in helping her cope. Her case manager clearly explained that her main responsibility was to focus on delivering academic instruction, not to take full responsibility for changing student behavior. This distinction gave her clarity and comfort. It helped reduce her stress, as she realized she was not expected to solve all the behavioral issues on her own.

Beyond emotional support, the administration also gave her opportunities to grow professionally. Her principal encouraged her to attend Professional Development Sessions (PDS), which helped her improve her teaching skills and classroom management strategies. These sessions made her feel equipped and more confident. In addition, she appreciated the trust placed in her. Her case manager did not micromanage her, but instead allowed her the space to make decisions while still offering guidance when needed. This trust, combined with consistent and clear communication, made her feel respected and supported in her role as a teacher.

Return: The Return with Gifts and Boons

Through confronting and overcoming the substantial hurdles presented by her new teaching environment, Participant 5 emerged notably enriched and empowered. Her journey significantly enhanced her skills in managing diverse learner needs, navigating complex behavioral challenges, and effectively leveraging institutional support. The experiences imbued her with greater resilience, adaptability, and clarity regarding her teaching philosophy and responsibilities. Upon returning, whether physically or metaphorically, she brings back invaluable insights into special education, refined approaches to student behavior management, and a renewed dedication to academic achievement balanced with compassionate understanding of student trauma. Her hero’s journey concludes by equipping her to positively influence and transform her home community with these significant, transformative gifts.

Her journey demonstrates how adversity can lead to

personal and professional growth. By facing unfamiliar and challenging situations in her teaching environment, she was able to learn new skills and improve her abilities. Her experience with students who had different learning needs and behavioral issues helped her become more effective and compassionate as a teacher. These challenges forced her to think differently, adjust her strategies, and become more patient and creative in the classroom.

She also learned how to make use of the support systems available in her school. This taught her the importance of asking for help and working closely with others, especially in a new and complex environment. Over time, she became more confident and clear about her role as an educator. She developed a stronger sense of purpose and a better understanding of how to balance academic goals with the emotional needs of her students.

When she returns to her home country or applies these experiences in other settings, she carries with her important lessons. She has gained practical tools for handling difficult classroom situations and has a deeper understanding of how to help students who have experienced trauma. These insights can help her become a more effective teacher and leader in her community. Her growth is not just for her own benefit—it also becomes a gift she can share with others, inspiring change and improvement in her teaching environment back home.

Participant 6

Departure: The Call to Adventure

Participant 6 began her journey after spending “17 years as a GenEd teacher in the Philippines.” Initially satisfied financially as a single individual, her life significantly changed during the pandemic when she had time for herself, stating, “I had a relationship during pandemic period because I had time for myself and I got married and I got a kid.” These life changes made her reconsider her financial stability, prompting her to explore new options.

Her experience reflects how personal life changes can drastically influence professional decisions. For many years, she felt content with her earnings as a General Education (GenEd) teacher in the Philippines. Her single status allowed her to live within her means, and she did not feel the urgency to seek opportunities elsewhere. However, the onset of the pandemic became a turning point. It gave her unexpected time to reflect and focus on her personal life, leading to marriage and eventually motherhood.

These new responsibilities made her reassess her financial stability. As a parent and a wife, her expenses increased. What used to be sufficient for one person was no longer enough for a family. The shift in her priorities—now centered on providing for her child and supporting her household—highlighted the limitations of her income as a teacher in the Philippines. This realization became the driving force behind her decision to seek better-paying opportunities abroad.

Her story emphasizes how major life transitions, such as

starting a family, can expose the financial gaps in one's current career path. It shows how the pandemic, while challenging in many ways, also gave people space to re-evaluate their goals. In her case, it led to a significant decision to pursue international teaching work—not just for professional growth, but as a means to secure her family's future. This reveals how deeply intertwined personal circumstances are with career choices, especially for overseas workers.

She candidly expressed, “the salary can't sustain the needs of my family.” Viewing her application to teach in the U.S. as divinely guided, she reflected, “I think it's God's plan because it is really smooth,” especially with CPS personnel traveling to the Philippines for interviews and demonstrations, aligning perfectly with cultural festivities like “the Sinulog Festival.” The statement “the salary can't sustain the needs of my family” reflects a common motivation among Overseas Filipino Teachers for seeking employment abroad. It shows the financial difficulty experienced by many teachers in the Philippines, especially after transitioning to new family responsibilities such as marriage and having children. Although the participant found fulfillment in her teaching job in the Philippines, she realized that her income was no longer enough to support her growing family's needs. This financial limitation pushed her to explore better opportunities overseas, believing that teaching in the United States could provide more economic stability and a better quality of life for her loved ones.

When she said, “I think it's God's plan because it is really smooth,” it revealed her deep personal faith and how she interpreted the unexpected ease of her application process as a sign of divine guidance. This perspective is important because it shows how personal beliefs can influence and strengthen one's decision-making and resilience. The arrival of CPS personnel in the Philippines for interviews and teaching demonstrations, particularly during the time of the Sinulog Festival, gave her a sense of assurance and cultural connection. The perfect timing of events seemed more than just a coincidence to her; it helped affirm her choice and gave her confidence in the journey she was about to take. This highlights how a sense of purpose and spiritual belief can help Filipino teachers cope with major life transitions and uncertainties.

Initiation: Facing Trials and Tribulations

Upon arrival in Illinois in July 2023, Participant 6 faced substantial professional challenges, transitioning from her extensive background in general education to teaching special education, despite having “no formal background in SPED teaching.” Her current role involved working as a “SPED teacher in a Resource room,” supporting second and third graders with disabilities. Her transition from general education in the Philippines to special education in Illinois marked a major shift in her teaching career. Having taught general education for 17 years, she was already confident in managing typical classroom settings. However, teaching in a special education

resource room in the U.S. required a different set of skills, strategies, and mindset. Without formal training in special education, she had to adapt quickly to new concepts such as individualized education plans (IEPs), behavioral interventions, and classroom accommodations for students with diverse learning needs.

This transition was professionally challenging because she had to learn on the job while fulfilling her daily responsibilities as a SPED teacher. Supporting second and third graders with disabilities required her to understand each child's unique educational and emotional needs. She needed to apply specialized teaching techniques to support learning progress, often without the benefit of prior experience. The pressure to perform effectively in a new system, coupled with her lack of formal SPED background, likely caused feelings of uncertainty and self-doubt.

Moreover, special education settings demand a higher level of patience, individualized planning, and collaboration with support staff. Participant 6 had to quickly build competence while meeting the expectations of the school, students, and parents. This challenge was intensified by cultural differences, unfamiliar teaching systems, and limited preparation time. Her experience highlights the difficulty of changing professional roles in a foreign educational environment and the resilience required to meet new expectations without prior formal training.

This transition was significantly eased by the support from mentors at her school who provided guidance, enabling her to understand previously unfamiliar elements such as IEPs. She emphasized, “Kahit ano yung problems namin ay tinutulungan talaga kami dahil way back sa Philippines ay wala talaga ako idea about IEPs,” reinforcing that, despite the steep learning curve, “we are really guided.” The transition into teaching in the United States was initially challenging for the participant due to her lack of experience in special education. In particular, she had no prior knowledge about Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), which are essential tools in supporting students with special needs. These documents require teachers to tailor educational approaches based on each student's unique learning needs. Coming from a background where such systems were not commonly used, she found herself in unfamiliar territory.

However, her school played a critical role in helping her adjust. The presence of mentors who were willing to assist her with any problem made a big difference. These mentors provided not only technical knowledge about IEPs but also emotional support during her period of adjustment. Their consistent guidance helped her build confidence and learn how to apply new teaching strategies in a structured and supportive environment.

The mentoring she received reflects how crucial institutional support is for overseas teachers adapting to a new educational system. Without such support, the learning curve would have been even more overwhelming. But because of the school's proactive

approach in assigning mentors and providing continuous help, she was able to gradually understand and manage the demands of her role. This support system did not just help her survive but also helped her thrive in her new teaching environment.

Participant 6 encountered practical difficulties, notably the insufficient staff support needed to adequately accommodate her students' needs. She articulated the challenge clearly, "We lack staff support that the students need," further emphasizing, "we are accommodating all the students and I cannot give them the full support for the whole day because I am going to accommodate other students. It's really unfair for the other students." She faced a major challenge in managing her students because of the lack of enough support staff. As a special education teacher, she needed additional adult assistance to help meet the individual needs of her students. However, due to staff shortages, she was forced to divide her attention among many learners. This made it difficult for her to provide full and focused support to each one.

The situation created an imbalance in her classroom. Some students received less attention, especially those who needed more time and assistance. This made her feel that the students were not receiving the fair and equal treatment they deserved. As a teacher who wanted to give her best, she was frustrated by her inability to give proper support throughout the day.

This kind of environment not only affected the quality of instruction but also created emotional stress for her as an educator. Knowing that she could not meet all her students' needs despite her willingness to do so was a source of discomfort and concern. It also highlighted the gap between what she was trained to do and the realities of her day-to-day teaching situation. The lack of staff support became a major barrier to effective teaching and student learning in her classroom.

Additionally, her workload extended into personal breaks, highlighting that "Kahit lunch break is like wala na akong break kase kailangan ko tumulong sa GenEd teacher because they need to feel they are safe in that learning space." The statement shows how the teacher's workload went beyond regular teaching hours. Even during her lunch break, she had to continue working. This indicates that her responsibilities were not limited to academic instruction alone. She also had to support her fellow teachers in managing the classroom environment. This reflects how demanding the teaching job is for overseas Filipino teachers, especially those in special education.

Her willingness to assist during her own break time highlights her dedication to student safety and well-being. It also shows the lack of available support in her school. Because there were not enough staff members, teachers had to help one another, even if it meant giving up their own rest time. This situation may lead to exhaustion or burnout if it happens regularly.

The teacher's action also emphasizes the importance of teamwork among educators. She knew that her help was necessary to maintain a safe and supportive classroom

environment. This shows that Filipino teachers abroad are not only focused on academics but also on creating spaces where students feel secure and valued. However, the fact that such support is needed during lunch breaks reveals gaps in the school's staffing system, which could affect both the teacher's well-being and overall job satisfaction.

Nevertheless, she received considerable emotional and practical backing from CPS, appreciating that "dito sa CPS is very supportive and admins kahit behavioral problems from students pero expected na po yun." The statement shows that the teacher feels supported by the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) system. Despite the difficulties she faces in managing student behavior, she does not feel alone. She knows that the administrators understand these challenges and do not judge her negatively for them. This gives her a sense of reassurance and confidence. It allows her to focus on teaching without the fear of being blamed for things beyond her control.

The phrase also highlights the importance of institutional support in helping teachers adapt to a new environment. When schools acknowledge that behavioral problems are common and expected, they create a more accepting and realistic work atmosphere. This reduces pressure on teachers, especially for those coming from another country with different classroom norms. It becomes easier for them to adjust when they know that they are not expected to "fix" every issue right away.

This kind of support also strengthens the emotional well-being of the teacher. Knowing that school leaders are aware of the challenges and are willing to help builds trust. It makes the teacher feel valued and respected. Emotional support is just as important as professional training, especially for teachers who are far from home. With this kind of backing, they are more likely to stay motivated and committed to their work.

She found comfort and resilience in her community of colleagues, acknowledging, "Kahit overwhelming ang behavior ng mga bata, at least, nag comfort ang mga teachers and at the end of the day kailangan laban lang." The teacher found strength in the support system provided by her fellow educators. Despite facing overwhelming challenges in managing student behavior, she did not feel completely alone. Her colleagues offered emotional reassurance and practical assistance, which helped her cope with the daily stress of her work. This sense of solidarity created a feeling of belonging, which is important for overseas teachers adjusting to a new environment.

Her statement also reflects a mindset of perseverance. Even when situations became difficult, especially with the emotional and physical toll of handling behavioral issues, she chose to continue. The phrase "kailangan laban lang" shows her determination to stay strong and push forward, even when things got tough. This attitude highlights how emotional support from peers can fuel resilience and motivate teachers to keep going despite adversities. The collective encouragement of her colleagues served not

only as comfort but also as a source of inner strength to fulfill her role as an educator.

Return: The Return with Gifts and Boons

Through enduring these challenges and successfully adapting to her new professional role, Participant 6 significantly grew in expertise, adaptability, and resilience. She articulated a clear sense of fulfillment and happiness, stating, "I am happy with what I am doing right now." Equipped with newfound knowledge of special education, effective classroom management skills, and strengthened by institutional support, Participant 6 returns metaphorically enriched with valuable professional insights and strategies. Her journey not only provided her with crucial financial stability for her growing family but also prepared her to positively impact her community through shared experiences and enhanced teaching methods.

Participant 6's experience highlights the profound professional and personal growth that can emerge from adversity. Although she entered a role for which she had no formal training, her willingness to adapt and learn enabled her to develop a strong foundation in special education. This transformation shows how unfamiliar challenges can become opportunities for growth when there is sufficient support and personal determination. Her development of new skills and her improved ability to manage diverse learners reflect her growing expertise and flexibility as an educator.

Her statement of happiness in her current role reveals a deep sense of fulfillment that goes beyond professional accomplishments. This suggests that overcoming adversity can also lead to emotional satisfaction, especially when one finds purpose and meaning in their work. The knowledge and strategies she gained from her experience now empower her not only to teach more effectively but also to support other educators who may face similar challenges. Furthermore, her financial stability allows her to better care for her family, demonstrating that professional success abroad can bring meaningful improvements to personal life. Her journey positions her to give back to the community, using her lived experiences to enrich the lives of others and foster better educational practices.

CONCLUSIONS

The six Overseas Filipino Teachers (OFTs) overcame substantial cultural, behavioral, and professional challenges in Illinois, emerging resilient and empowered with enhanced teaching skills and deeper empathy to positively impact their communities. Their journeys culminated in profound personal and professional growth, equipping them to positively transform their communities with enhanced skills, resilience, and deeper empathy. The common adversities experienced by the six Filipino teachers in Illinois revolved around managing intense student behavioral challenges, adapting to unfamiliar educational systems, overcoming initial

financial and emotional hardships, and navigating cultural differences, all of which they successfully overcame through resilience and supportive school communities.

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