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AAPI Nexus: Policy, Practice and Community

Title
Special Issue on K—12 Education

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/71b8c4qp

Journal
AAPI Nexus: Policy, Practice and Community, 7(1)

ISSN
1545-0317

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Publication Date
2009

DOI
10.17953/appc.7.1.a42377772l8q0024

Copyright Information

Peer reviewed

Message from the Editors

Special Issue on K–12 Education

Peter Nien-chu Kiang and Mitchell J. Chang

Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities have individually and collectively invested enormous trust in US educational institutions on behalf of themselves and their children. Ironically, as we have argued elsewhere (Kiang, 2006), by not entering the field of education directly with comparable commitments, AAPIs have seemingly left the roles of leadership and decision making within those institutions to others. But, in this first of three special issues of *AAPI Nexus* that focus on education, we begin to map a changing landscape.

In marking a new decade, we find ourselves in an intense period of pain and possibility. War and recession as well as severe budget cuts to schools, universities, and community infrastructure will have an impact on vulnerable populations for many years to come. At the same time, for the moment, remarkable influxes of federal education stimulus funds from the 2009 Recovery Act and fresh 2010 Race to the Top grants signal shifting policy priorities from the Obama administration that will soon lead to significant revision and eventual reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act. With the decennial census process also underway, updated counts of the US population will provide policy makers, civic leaders, funders, and researchers as well as the media and public-at-large with much new data to consider regarding the country's residents as a whole and the complex, changing profiles of AAPI populations in particular.

Within this larger context at the grassroots level, we see compelling, specific instances of K–12 educational progress and innovation such as the recent election of Vimala Phongsavonh, a Lao American youth organizer, to the school committee of Woonsocket, Rhode Island, a small city much like other New England former textile mill centers where Southeast Asian refugee populations resettled in the 1980s. Born and raised in Woonsocket, Vimala took office in December 2009 (Naddeau, 2009). Still in her early twen-

ties, Vimala is, we believe, the first Lao American elected school board member in the region and perhaps in the country. Her fresh example, we suggest, is one of many that illustrate what Jean Ryoo references in this volume as "the making of history." Another instance at the community level is the case for the Mary Queen of Viet Nam-Community Development Corporation's successful development and expansion of a trilingual (Vietnamese/Spanish/English) charter school based in the post-Katrina Gulf Coast Vietnamese community of New Orleans East—suggesting the value in recognizing community contexts distinct from either the West or East coasts (Bùi et al., 2009).

In our roles as guest editors of these *AAPI Nexus* education-focused issues, we have learned about other examples. Given the opportunity to review far more articles submitted from the field than what we could accept for publication due to journal page limitations—we clearly see an exciting and expanding horizon of AAPI educational research. Thankfully, we did not feel the competing necessity to allocate primary space in this issue to refute "model" minority paradigms, as we have had to do so many times in past publications (Museus & Kiang, 2009). However, the notion of "modeling" is one that we still find useful as an essential aspect of effective, sustainable practice.

In jointly developing our calls for submissions to the K–12- and the higher education–focused special issues, we intended to capture some of the dynamics of momentum and maturation in our distinct fields but did not originally anticipate the possibility of a third issue. Too often, though, the domains of education, from pre-school and K–12 to postsecondary and adult community based, are segmented and compartmentalized—conceptually, institutionally, and operationally. We realized the value of creating *AAPI Nexus* space in order to prioritize these important intersections of access, advocacy, and curriculum across K–16 and beyond—in terms of presenting specific content and as a way of explicitly *modeling* our holistic editorial stance as researchers with multiple involvements across all of these domains (Kiang, 2004). Further articulation of our evolving vision will follow in the higher education–focused second special issue and in the third special issue focusing on K–12 and higher education intersections.

In the following pages devoted to K–12, we highlight fresh insights and examples addressing issues that vary from teacher be-

liefs and dropout profiles to bilingual special-education practices and historical lessons from Asian Movement news media. Populations of interest include Hmong, Vietnamese, and Chinese high school students as well as Filipina/o-centered representations in the curriculum. Methodologically mixed, the contributions range from school-based ethnographic observation and teacher interview data to critical, bilingual document analysis and narrative analysis of archival materials to regression analysis of districtwide longitudinal data. Our intention in choosing these examples is not only to highlight the particular findings presented in each article but also to encourage interdisciplinary and cross-community dialogue.

The first contribution is a resource article from Patricia Espiritu Halagao, Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales, and Joan May T. Cordova that synthesizes the breadth of curriculum development efforts by Filipina/o American educators during the past forty years. Based on their own original, collaboratively designed framework of review, these three leading Pinay educators carefully evaluate thirty-three examples of curricular resources in terms of critical content, instruction, and impact. Informed theoretically by critical pedagogy, curriculum studies, and "Pinay peminista praxis," their analysis provides teachers and program developers with access to numerous high-quality curriculum resources that are available in print and/or online from sources such as *iJeepney*, Pinoy Teach, and Pin@y Educational Partnerships. Practitioners in school and community settings—whether or not they serve large numbers of Filipino American students—will find the twenty-item based Critical Framework of Review instrument and matrix summary of curricular examples in Tables 1 and 2 to be particularly useful. Clearly, claims that no comprehensive or substantial Filipino American curricula exist are indefensible. Those who are similarly involved with school- and community-based curriculum development centered on the voices and experiences of other ethnic-specific groups such as Vietnamese Americans, Korean Americans, or Indian Americans may also want to adapt the authors' criterion-based critical review framework for their own purposes.

Also informed by critical theory, but with an application to a specific school setting, cultural anthropologist Leena Her brings us inside a learning community focusing on the educational achievement of English Learners, including a large and diverse Hmong student body within a California high school. Based on eighteen

months of ethnographic observation, Her's grounded analysis of how teachers and administrators "explain failure" illustrates some of the difficult conditions and contradictions that face Hmong and other English Learners in a "low-performing" high school immersed in various educational reform requirements mandated, in part, by No Child Left Behind policies. Teacher beliefs about immigrant students, limited English language proficiency, and academic failure emerge as important, albeit conflated, factors that contribute to a glossing over of students' actual identities and potential. Her's work provides a relevant comparison study for the important, recent analysis released by the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (2009) on the effects of small-school restructuring on English Language Learners at two high school sites in Brooklyn, New York.

Complementing Her's ethnography of "explain failure," esteemed Asian American education scholar Valerie Ooka Pang provides thoughtful documentation of Asian American teacher beliefs and practices in an empirical effort to explain "success" in a low-income K–8 school in California with predominantly Asian American and Latino students. Based on in-depth interviews with nineteen teachers—all of whom are Asian American—Pang's research comes from a larger school-based study with the purpose of describing "cultures of achievement." Pang's grounded theory approach reveals a rich interplay of culturally responsive instruction and caring-centered pedagogy, together with high expectations and careful alignment with district and state standards. Few prior studies have examined Asian American teacher practice. Pang's work, like that of Patricia Akemi Neilson's study of Asian American senior administrators in US universities (Neilson, 2009; Neilson and Suyemoto, 2009) foregrounds the typically unspoken but bedrock role of internalized cultural values that are enacted by AAPI educational leaders in their daily practice.

From a different geographic shore and using entirely different methods of data analysis, Phitsamay Sychitkokhong Uy examines districtwide data during a four-year period in order to calculate dropout odds for a cohort of Vietnamese and Chinese American high school students in one urban East Coast school district. With a robust sample size of 425, Sychitkokhong Uy uses a series of logistic regression models to examine the roles and interactions of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and gender in association with students' dropping out of school. She finds that low-income Chinese and Vietnamese

youth are roughly two-thirds as likely to graduate in four years when compared with their higher income peers in the same school district, and that, for each ethnic group, girls are roughly 50 percent more likely than boys to graduate from high school in four years. Interestingly, among the low-income students, Chinese American youth had greater odds of dropping out within four years than their Vietnamese American peers. Sychitkokhong Uy's methods and findings are an important contribution to the overall literature on dropping out, and she provides a useful example of why disaggregated AAPI educational research is so necessary to conduct and support.

In counterpoint with these analyses of current realities, Jean Ryoo looks historically at the documentation of AAPI K–12 school and youth issues during a period of time just prior to the institutionalization of programs such as public bilingual education, higher education equal opportunity, and gang youth-outreach services. Based on a rigorous content analysis of all issues of the Asian Movement newspaper *Gidra*, published monthly from 1969 to 1974, Ryoo recounts numerous examples from *Gidra* that describe Samoan and Pilipino youth organizing, service models to support Chinese immigrant English language learners, and demands for more relevant Asian American studies curricula. Ryoo sees thematic continuities in the issues articulated then and now for AAPI populations and suggests that the lens of *Gidra* can be used productively to address contemporary K–12 education challenges—particularly in terms of community organizing, activism, and documentation.

Finally, former bilingual teacher and a leading authority on special education and Chinese immigrant families, Lusa Lo, provides a practitioner's essay on the problematics of translating Individual Education Programs (IEPs) from English to Chinese—the process and product of which are required by federal regulation in order to protect the rights and ensure the involvement of families in determining the most appropriate special education services and accommodations for children with disabilities. The process of IEP preparation is designed to involve all relevant stakeholders including the classroom teacher(s), special education services provider(s), and parent(s). When accepted in final form, the IEP is a legally binding document that defines the specific education plan for the child with disabilities. In Lo's essay, based on careful review of twenty specific cases of IEPs that were produced in English and translated into Chinese for parents to review and ap-

prove, she finds numerous errors and inconsistencies, including some she considers severe, within and across the documents. Lo's assessment concretely reveals how one critical aspect of educational policy and practice at the intersection of disability, language, and culture is compromised, and she offers specific suggestions to address the problems exposed by her study. Lo also highlights a larger need to examine the domains of special education and disability studies with other AAPI populations, particularly those with language rights and needs at stake. Her urgings reinforce the analysis of 2000 US Census data by the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC), which showed, for example, that nearly one of four (23.6%) Cambodian Americans ages five and older reported having disabilities—the highest percentage among Asian American groups and significantly greater than one of five (19.3%) people overall in the United States (Tang, 2008; SEARAC, 2004).

Other recent national reports compiled by Robert Teranishi and colleagues for the College Board (2008) and by the US federal government's watchdog agency, the General Accounting Office (US General Accounting Office, 2007) similarly highlight the specific challenges that face disaggregated AAPI subgroups, particularly Khmer, Lao, Hmong, Samoans, Chamorros, and Native Hawaiians. We are hopeful that the national impact of these studies and other signs of progress such as the growing AAPI interest group memberships of the American Educational Research Association and the Association for the Study of Higher Education signal a shift in the landscape of the field so that calling for disaggregated data and debunking the model minority myth may no longer need to be the primary points of our publications (Museus and Chang, 2009; Suyemoto et al., 2009).

When we last worked together closely on a coauthored essay, roughly a decade ago, we concluded:

> Yet just as students and scholars in Asian American studies critique public stereotypes in portraying Asian Americans, they must also examine the limitations of their own visions and take greater collective responsibility for transforming the nation's higher educational system, including its systemic engagement with K–12 education and with Asian American communities. The racial crisis in U.S. higher education does not begin or end inside university walls. Neither should the commitments of Asian Americans, in all their complexity and with all their contradictions. (Chang and Kiang, 2002, 155)

Although our view from the past still rings too true for both Asian American and Pacific Islander populations, we hope, more importantly, that this new *AAPI Nexus* special issue—and two more that will soon follow—will encourage fresh, proactive agendas for relevant research, policy, and practice in our schools and communities.

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