



Akung Sugidanon: An Autoethnographic Journey of Self, Culture, and Teaching

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Abstract

Review Article

This qualitative autoethnography explores how an educator’s cultural heritage and personal challenges shape their role as a living repository of stories, their own and those of their students. Rooted in the Visayan concept of Sugidanon, meaning “the telling of stories as remembered,” it examines the way self, culture, and teaching intersect through memory work and lived experience. The researcher navigates three key realms: Kalisud, the struggles and spiritual lessons of childhood; Pagpasimbag, the ebb and flow of migration and adaptation; and *Utang nga Buot, a profound sense of professional responsibility. Drawing from diaries, family narratives, and multilingual records, the study traces the threads linking the educator’s life to their practice in the classroom. The journey moves from Aklan to Quirino, weaving through storms of identity crisis before arriving at renewal. Along the way, Bisaya, Ilocano, and Ifugao traditions intertwine, forming a rich tapestry of teaching shaped by lived history. The research reveals that genuine cultural responsiveness is born from a teacher’s own story, fueling self-awareness and a distinctive creative approach to education. Ultimately, it argues that teaching isn’t just instruction; it’s an act of connection and healing. By honoring each teacher’s Sugidanon first, educators can more fully embrace and uplift the diverse stories of their students. These findings open the door for more insider voices to influence educational thinking and policy.

Keywords: *Sugidanon, teacher identity, autoethnography, acculturation, culturally responsive instruction.*

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Introduction

A Sugidanon (my Story), a Bisayan term, is more than just a story in the Visayan tradition; it is a transmission of truths through shared breath, rhythm, and memory. My formative years in Libacao, Aklan, established the first layer of my cultural identity. In

our community, culture was not a subject learned in school; it was the air we breathed, manifested in the “bayanihan” of the rice fields, the communal meals by the river, and the silent transmission of resilience from elders to the young. These early experiences formed what Geertz famously termed “webs of significance”, webs that gave me my initial



worldview, grounding me in kinship, labor, and spirituality.

However, the path of a sugidanon is rarely straight. The tribal war that prompted my family to relocate from Aklan to Quirino Province caused a rupture in my cultural web. This journey threw me into an identity problem, putting me in an environment dominated by Ilocano, Ifugao, and Igorot traditions. It was here that I experienced the reality of acculturation, which Berry (2022) defines as the struggle between preserving one's background and adjusting to a dominant culture. I transitioned from feeling like a "stranger in a new land" to a state of absorption, not an erasure of my Bisaya identity, but an expansion. My identity evolved into a tapestry fashioned from threads of Bisaya perseverance, Ilocano industry, and Ifugao land connection.

This study proposes to explore this become-ance. As educators, we refer to "culturally responsive teaching" as a body of practices. But I think real responsiveness comes from the teacher themselves doing their own inner work. My method of instruction is not theoretical, but biographical. As I stand in front of a class full of linguistically diverse students, I see parts of my younger self, crying to be understood, translating thoughts from one language to another and longing for acceptance.

Indeed, this work is important because teacher's voice is often overlooked in the conversation regarding education. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory tells us that culture mediates learning, but we seldom do an analysis of the teacher's culture as a mediator. I intend to fill this gap by documenting my sugidanon. This study explores the ways that an identity-challenged, rural, migrant, multi-grade teacher becomes an inclusive teacher. It is a reflexive act—looking inward through the lens to see how my past interacts with my doing in practice—as well as an act of advocacy to acknowledge the lived experience of educators who, like myself, teach with everything they have. For example, Akung Sugidanon helps us understand that teaching involves being connected and healing one another. Understanding the progression from my own history of self, culture, and survival as a prospective teacher provides context for understanding how my students

bring different Sugidanons into the classroom each day.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative autoethnographic research design to examine how the researcher's lived experiences, cultural background, and personal history shaped teaching identity and pedagogical practice. In autoethnography, the researcher assumes the dual role of participant and analyst, allowing personal narratives to be critically examined within broader cultural and social contexts.

The inquiry was situated at Quirino State University, located in Quirino Province, which served as the institutional setting where the researcher's professional experiences as an educator evolved. The primary data source was the researcher's autobiographical narrative titled Akung Sugidanon ("My Story"), which documented key life experiences across three domains: early life and childhood poverty (Kalisud), migration and cultural transition (Pagpasimbag), and professional development in teaching (Utang nga Buot).

Data were generated through systematic memory work, including personal journals, reflective writings, guided narrative recollections, and selected family oral histories to support the reconstruction of lived experiences.

To preserve cultural authenticity, narratives were initially written in the researcher's native dialect and subsequently translated into English for analysis. The narrative texts were organized and analyzed using NVivo, following the thematic analysis framework of Braun and Clarke (2006), which involved data familiarization, open coding, categorization, theme development, and reflexive interpretation. Through this process, key themes describing the researcher's journey of identity, culture, and teaching practice were generated.

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study by applying relational ethics, including the use of pseudonyms and composite character descriptions to protect the privacy of individuals mentioned in the narrative, as well as process consent from family

members when recounting sensitive experiences. All narrative materials were handled with strict confidentiality to ensure the integrity and ethical conduct of the research.

Results and Discussions

The following figure articulates NVivo’s Concept Map of the narrative.

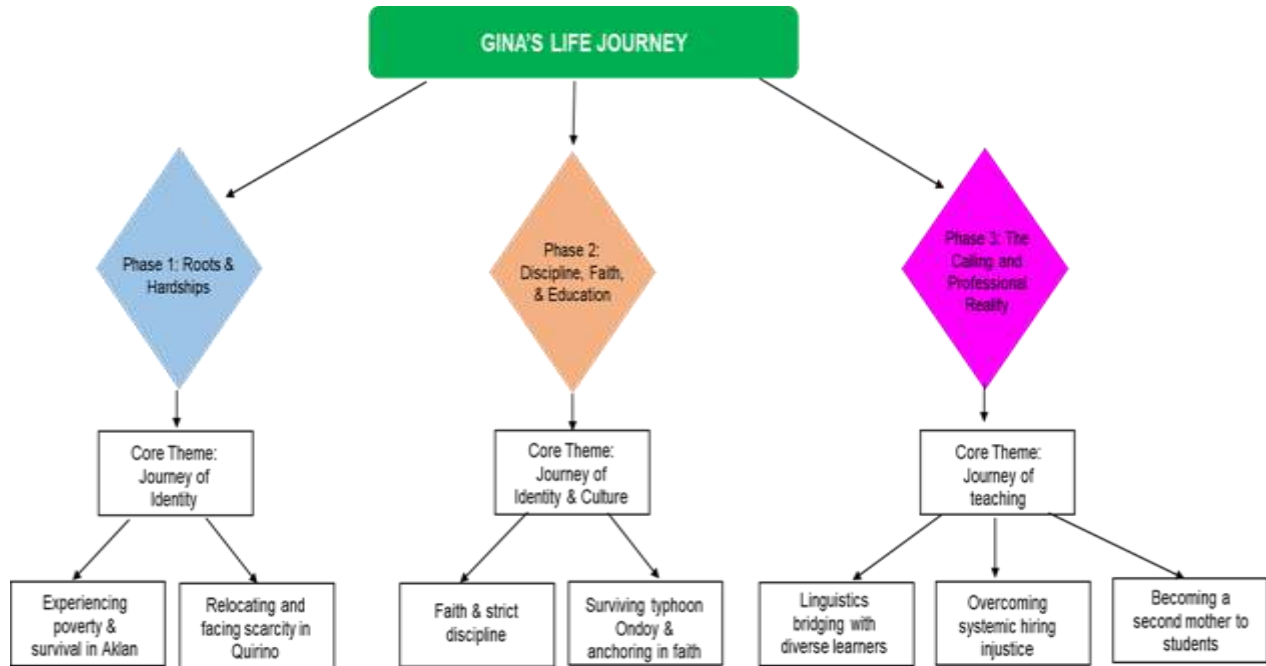


Figure 1. Concept Map of “Akung Sugidanon”

The inquiry's thematic results are shown in Table 1. Therefore, a first-person, evocative tone is used in the creation of themes (child nodes or subthemes) in accordance with the autoethnographic design (Lungu, 2022). The analysis takes control of the story by employing pronouns like "I" and "My," which turn abstract concepts into embodied realities. This choice of style encourages the reader to go beyond mere observation and experience Kalisud, Pagpasimbag, and Paghimo sa Dalan firsthand. As a result, the themes' specifics are as follows:

I. JOURNEY OF IDENTITY

My identity as a teacher was shaped in the furnace of my everyday existence rather than in the security of a lecture hall. This portion confronts the unvarnished reality of my roots, going beyond academic

abstractions. Here, I follow "Kalisud" (Hardship) and "Pagtuo" (Faith), the two forces that, long before I ever entered a classroom, shaped the resilience I now bring to my teaching.

Theme #1 - Kalisud (Hardship) as Pedagogy

The callouses of survival, rather than ink, were the first motif of my identity. My first classroom was "Kalisud" (Hardship), a pedagogy of deprivation that taught me what no textbook could: resilience is created in the lack of comfort, and hunger sharpens the mind.

Subtheme #1.1. My Battle with Physiological Scarcity

This topic encapsulates the defining struggle of my early years, which was a basic deficiency of the

body's most necessities rather than just a lack of money. Scarcity was a bodily experience that governed every waking minute rather than an abstract economic term. It was the math of subtracting: taking away food, solace, and assurance until just the most basic survival instinct was left. This struggle served as the main curriculum for my early years, teaching me that mastering the skill of survival was a prerequisite to dreaming of becoming a teacher.

"Nabuhi kami sa mga haguyam-ot nga mais, baringhoy, inang ka ag bisan anong puydeng hikaon agud masudlan lang I busong namon. ("We survived on corn grits, cassava, and whatever root crops we could find.")

Moving from the beach sceneries of Aklan to the alpine terrains of Quirino required a considerable adjustment in my self-perception because my identity as an educator is not a set destination but rather an ongoing process of "becoming" and "reconstructing." This shift exemplifies the idea of identity negotiation because I had to balance my cultural background with the demands of a new workplace. Teachers frequently have to negotiate the conflicts between their personal and professional lives, according to Hiratsuka (2022). In addition, my encounters with students and the larger institutional framework have shaped my identity, which is intrinsically relational. This is consistent with the ideas of Eryilmaz and Dikilitaş (2025), who contend that social conditions continuously modify teacher identity. I have used what Zen, Ropo, and Kupila (2022) refer to as a "narrative space" to reconstruct my past and discover greater significance in my current professional life through this autoethnographic reflection.

My struggle with physiological scarcity is a reflection of my early struggles in our little rice and peanut field, Bat-ol, with unfulfilled necessities, food, security, and physical comfort. When I was six or seven years old, I protected maturing grains from sparrows without fully realizing that my joyful yells contributed to our family's survival. Our dinners, which consisted of boiled kamote and gabi with dried fish, were straightforward and unpredictable because

my siblings cast nets into the river in the hope, while my mother patiently pulled weeds under the sun. This battle was not marked by rebellion but by quiet endurance. In the midst of material lack, I learned resilience, shared responsibility, and the dignity of striving together as a family.

Subtheme 1.2. The Hunger I Felt and the Crumbs I Waited For

A painful reminder of my status in the world, hunger was the regular rhythm of my day. I remember the innate humiliation and desperate hope of waiting for actual and figurative crumbs dropped by those with more. I developed a strong sense of empathy as a result of this experience; I was able to understand the silent language of a hungry youngster because I had spoken it myself. I started to realize the true significance of a meal during these times of extreme emptiness, and I came to the conclusion that some students require a full stomach in order to concentrate.

"Sa oras it reces, ginatiis ko I gutom hay waay gid kamit pirmi nga balon, nagapinanagitlon gidlang duy awat ko." ("I endured recess with nothing but swallowed saliva.")

"Nagahulat ako ka mga pagkaon nga gakahulog sa semento agud may makaon lang ako. ("I waited for crumbs of food dropped on the floor just to have something to eat.")

I vividly recall walking more than an hour each morning to school in Aklan (Visayas), navigating small trails, steep climbs and descents, and foggy mountain paths that put my feet and will to the test. Slippers wore out fast when I did have some. There were days the mud was made to pull me back because I belonged in a field, not in school. Most days I did not have money to buy anything at recess time. The smell of bread, chips or biscuits would make me feel sick when other children opened their packages. I learned to pretend I wasn't hungry; sometimes I would just look the other way.

At other times, I would stealthily wait until the classroom was empty at the conclusion of recess before carefully scanning the floor in the hopes of finding any leftover half-eaten pieces or fallen

crumbs. On certain days, I would eat everything I could find on the ground for a snack, such as tiny pieces of "Maxi," "Sweet Corn," or "Karaoke" chips. Despite their diminutive size, they seemed like a feast to me. I would take my time eating them, as though delaying the flavor would prevent hunger from returning.

Subtheme 1.3. My Choice: Survival over Schooling

There came a pivotal moment when the need for work and the luxury of education clashed. To make sure my family had food, I had to choose between working in the charcoal pits and sitting in a classroom. It was an act of sacrifice rather than truancy to prioritize survival over education. It was an agonizing postponement of my aspirations, a "stopping out" that ironically made me more determined. I discovered that education is a privilege that is frequently paid for with sweat, and this delay only increased my desire to someday return and reclaim the education I had been denied.

"Naninkamot ko pag-ayo, giprioridad ang pagtrabaho aron makakaon kaysa mosulod sa klase." ("I worked hard, prioritizing labor for food rather than attending class.")

Gaturugan kami sa uringan kagto agud mabuhi lang. ("Sleeping in charcoal pits to survive.")

During those uncertain days, I went to the abaca fields with my mother. My tiny hands bled from the jagged threads, and the muck stuck to my legs like a second skin. However, my mother never let her voice falter. Like a pillar supporting our small world, she continued to be strong, solid, and sturdy. "If she can stand, then so can I," I recall thinking as I stared at her. My mother and I switched to trade when working in the fields got too risky. We offered fish, ice buko, and minor items for sale. My siblings and I sold roasted peanuts at the market on Sundays. Only once a week does our community market open, but on that day, everything seemed to come together. People from distant sitios arrived with woven bags and baskets, their faces softened by kindness but yet marred by time and sun. I also learned how to produce charcoal. It was labor-intensive and filthy. After cutting down trees, we would stack the wood,

cover it with dirt, and burn it slowly for several days. We used to have to sleep close to the charcoal pits so we could keep an eye on the fire. My skin would be covered in black soot, the smoke would burn my eyes, and the heat would be unbearable. However, I knew that every bag of charcoal meant rice on our table, so I did it.

Because of these situations, I became aware that the world I knew had changed at that very instant. My youthful innocence broke. The sound of the river faded. Children's laughter seemed far away. I lost some of my innocence on that day. On that day, I also started to realize that sometimes it's necessary to move on from the place where you were raised.

Theme #2 "Pagtuo" (Faith) as Sustenance

"Pagtuo" (Faith) served as my compass during this difficult time. When the earth beneath my feet began to collapse, it was the silent, unwavering power that kept me upright, turning my suffering from a pointless burden into an essential training ground for the teacher I was destined to become.

Subtheme 2.1. My Discipline of Knee-Bent Prayer

For me, faith was a physical discipline rather than a passive belief. Early on, I discovered that my knees hitting the floor was the only way to bridge the gap between my enormous challenges and my survival. "Knee-bent prayer" was my daily act of defiance against despair. I gave up my fears in the peaceful nooks of our small house, not to run away from reality but to find the will to confront it. I gained a great deal of resilience from this ceremony, which taught me that genuine power comes from bending humbly to seek direction larger than myself rather than standing tall with pride.

"Sa mga adlaw nga akung paksakripisyo sa sulod ka simbahan imaw e nagtudo kanakon ka maayad nga direkyon sa disiplina ag pagsunod."

"Pagtuo," or faith, developed as a solid anchor that transformed my pain into a meaningful preparation for my work as an educator during a period of intense personal and systemic hardship. For me, religion was

never a passive belief but rather a strict physical discipline marked by "knee-bent prayer," a daily practice that served as a protest against despair. As an essential method of spiritual coping, this spiritual practice supplied the internal nourishment required to sustain long-term deprivation. This fit with Resilience Theory emphasizes how spirituality serves as a buffer, enabling people to keep a "calm center" even in the face of severe stress.

When faced with significant life experiences, including the devastation of Typhoon Ondoy and a horrific home invasion, my religion further evolved into a physical haven. These encounters strengthened my belief that spiritual perseverance and career success are closely related. I bring this "calm center" into the classroom as I negotiate the difficulties of teaching today, remaining steadfast in the face of professional storms. Counted et al. (2021) reinforce this viewpoint by arguing that faith offers the resilience required to survive and find meaning in trauma when physical food is unavailable. In the end, I've discovered that anyone can overcome any challenge, whether it be personal or professional, if they prioritize spiritual will and holiness.

I turned into a "sacrifice," a term used to describe young people who dedicated years of their lives to full-time church service in return for academic help. It was formation, not just work. It was a disciplined existence. Having boyfriends or girlfriends was forbidden to us. We were not allowed to use cell phones. We had a rigorous dress code that prohibited sleeveless tops and required skirts to be four inches below the knee. We had a rigid schedule: 4:00 AM for breakfast, 5:00 AM for devotion, 6:00 AM for work or school, 5:00 AM for nighttime devotion, and lights out. I learned to submit to authority and the importance of postponing satisfaction in favor of a bigger aim from this regulated existence.

Subtheme 2.2. Finding My Sanctuary during Trauma

After experiencing floods from Typhoon Ondoy on September 26, 2009, my physical and emotional sense of security in my home was destroyed and violated. Nevertheless, I was at peace with myself and the comfort provided by my faith during this terrible time. This entry will show how my faith was

the only thing that remained secure; thus, I was able to endure the physical and emotional devastation of Typhoon Ondoy. I withdrew into this spiritual haven in order to save my inner being rather than to ignore the terror all around me. Finding a "calm center" in the middle of chaos is a survival technique that I now use in my classroom, enabling me to remain composed even while the storms of my line of work rage.

"E pagkaluwas ko sa bagyo nga Ondoy nga umagi sa kinabuhi kunwaay e burig ka Ginoo bas ikon waay du ako kaya." ("Surviving the terror of home invasion and Typhoon Ondoy was God's mercy.")

Kon ibutang moy pagsarig ag pagtuo mo sa Ginoo tanan nga ubrahon mo hay madaog kaw. ("When you put God's will and righteousness above everything else, you will overcome.")

The year 2005 also provided my aunt with a very embarrassing moment because I saw three teens stealing from my mom's neighbors. I was at home alone when they pointed a gun at me. As I stood shaking in fear, I thought this was it! This was going to be my last minute on Earth! At no time did any of these three guys inflict harm upon me. They ultimately took what they wanted & left without harming me, but after they left, God gave me a tremendous lesson in "God's Protection" at my weakest point.

Then Typhoon Ondoy struck on September 26, 2009. The water surged so quickly. As a working student, I was confined to the second floor of the house where I resided. The raging torrents beneath me carried cars, debris, and human cries. I had no way to get in touch with my family, no food, and no electricity. I stayed there for hours, watching the water rise while I prayed. I made it through. However, I carried the trauma from that day with me for a very long time. Concurrently, I have faced numerous obstacles in my eight years and six months of teaching—personal, professional, emotional, and spiritual. But through it all, I clung to one truth: you will overcome any obstacle and achieve success if you prioritize God's will and holiness. Even if the journey is difficult and drawn out, it is never taken alone.

II. JOURNEY OF CULTURE

My development as a teacher is closely linked to my cultural journey. My upbringing's customs, ideals, and challenges became the cornerstone of my pedagogical identity rather than just personal recollections. Reflecting on my own life experiences within the context of classroom culture, it has become evident to me that the process of teaching is inseparable from culture; the culture in which I grew up has had a major impact on all aspects of my interactions, discipline, and communication with students. Therefore, my study is both an academic pursuit and a continuation of the work of my life, where the areas of my professional obligations and personal journey intersect.

Theme#3 – “Pagpasimbag” (Adaptation/ Assimilation)

"Pagpasimbag" captures my continuous journey of adjusting to various learning environments while staying rooted in my heritage. I discovered how to balance maintaining my cultural identity with adhering to institutional standards when I stepped into new academic settings and interacted with students from different backgrounds. My pedagogy has been shaped by this adaptability, which taught me to be adaptable, sensitive to cultural differences, and to value students' personal stories. Instead of giving up on my roots as I assimilated, I let them guide a more adaptable and inclusive teaching style.

Subtheme 3.1. My Confusion amidst Cultural Shock

It was a collision rather than a smooth shift from my own cultural heritage to Quirino customs. "Cultural shock" was the bewilderment of being in a place where the norms of behavior had shifted. I had not yet learned to understand the unwritten social laws, the rhythms of communal life, and the dowry (akbanan) rites. This bewilderment was not just academic; it was a profoundly personal upheaval that made me wonder where this new universe ended, and my own identity began.

“I akbanan sa Bisaya kumpara sa Quirino hay mabahal nga mas simple nga ritwal it pag-asawa sa Visayas.” ("The costly 'akbanan'

(dowry) customs in Quirino (versus) simple rites in Visayas.")

The theme of "Pagpasimbag" symbolizes the intricate process of cultural adjustment I went through following my family's relocation from Aklan to Quirino Province. My long-standing Bisaya customs clashed with the strange social norms of Ilocano and Ifugao groups during this "culture shock" rather than a straightforward melding of lives. For example, when I contrasted the simple marriage ceremonies in my village with Quirino's complex akbanan (dowry) system, which frequently put enormous financial strain on families, I felt profoundly confused. Berry's (2022) theory of acculturation, which characterizes the ongoing struggle between preserving one's original history and adjusting to the demands of a dominating new culture, is consistent with this experience. This process of assimilation allowed me to reconstitute my identity as a "tapestry" of other traditions rather than losing my original identity.

This adaptation was also profoundly linguistic, as I found it difficult to express myself while "stumbling over my words" in unfamiliar dialects like Ifugao and Ilocano. At first, this linguistic barrier made me feel "otherness" and alone, like a "stranger at the gate" who was physically present in the school but emotionally lost. But in the end, this marginalization turned into an essential teaching strategy. I became more aware of the "unspoken needs" of my varied students as a result of managing my own cultural and language dislocation. This result validates the findings of Majhanovich (2024), who highlights that active engagement with cultural variety is necessary for successful acculturation in order to enhance social functioning. In the end, I learned from "Pagpasimbag" that teaching is an open and humble discipline that calls for teachers to develop alongside their students as they overcome cultural barriers.

The wedding custom was one of the most noticeable distinctions I came across. Marriage ceremonies in the Visayas were often straightforward, with families getting together for a simple dinner—sardines and noodles, if that was all they could afford. Although there was little financial strain, the union was applauded. But in Quirino, I learned about the

akbanan (dowry) system, a custom in which the groom's family must give a sizeable dowry—typically in the form of cash, rice, or pigs—before the wedding can happen. Although it was a magnificent demonstration of family dignity and strength, it seemed overpowering to me. I witnessed families incurring debt in order to satisfy these demands. My upbringing and the reality of the community I was serving at the time conflicted, causing me to experience culture shock.

Subtheme 3.2. Stumbling Over My Words in a New Tongue

Since language is the means of communication, being without it left me feeling incredibly alone. Fluent in the expressive rhythm of Kinaray-a, my tongue faltered over the jagged edges of Ifugao and Ilocano. Every phrase I mispronounced served as a reminder of my "otherness." Nevertheless, I discovered a new way to listen in this floundering. By learning to read eyes, gestures, and silences in addition to speech, I was able to overcome my language disadvantage and become more perceptive of the underlying needs of others around me.

"Pagkat-on sa pagsulti sa bag-ong mga diyalekto, samtang kanunay kong mohunong sa pipila ka mga pulong nga ang tingog paminawon dili pamilyar o lahi." ("Learning to speak the new dialects, as I often find myself pausing over words whose sounds feel unfamiliar or strange.")

Furthermore, the language barrier has been one of my main challenges over the last two years. My students come from a variety of linguistic backgrounds. I was frequently required to teach twice: once in Ilocano and once in Tagalog. A couple of my students spoke pure Ifugao, which I found difficult to understand despite my best efforts, while others spoke Bisaya.

"Ang akong mga estudyante naggikan sa lain-laing mga lingguwistikong background... Nagsalig ko sa mga estudyante nga mahimong maghubad." ("My learners came from different linguistic backgrounds... I relied on student translators.")

During the cooperative activity using younger children's translators for student conversations in a shared language, one of my students (a Bisaya speaker) translated for other Bisaya-speaking students, while another student (an Ifugao speaker) translated for students from other first languages (other than Ilocano and Tagalog) during this experience. This opportunity allowed me to reflect on my teaching style and contemplate how I can serve as a translator (from student to self) as the instructor has become the learner through this experience.

Subtheme 3.3. Feeling Like a Stranger at the Gate

Being a stranger is being visible but not yet a part of a community. This topic encapsulates the profound loneliness of being "at the gate"—that is, physically present in the community and school but emotionally lost. It was the sensation of being a visitor in someone else's house, continuously balancing the need to fit in with the anxiety of being invaded. This marginalization experience turned into a potent teaching tool, enabling me to immediately identify and connect with the students who sat on the periphery of my own classroom and felt as alienated as I had.

"Pagdumdom ko tana hay isara akong baguhanang tawo sa isang lugar." "I felt like a stranger in a new land."

I was a stranger in a foreign country. I was surrounded by strangers, the language seemed strange, and the rituals were ones I had only seen on television or in books. There were times when I felt lonely and missed the comfort of being understood without having to translate my thoughts, as well as the familiar cadence of Kinaray-a or Aklanon.

C. JOURNEY OF TEACHING (MY PROFESSION)

Since I began teaching, I have developed through my experiences as an educator by reflecting upon those experiences and gaining new knowledge to advance my teaching practices. Relationships formed throughout my educational journey—even when faced with unsuccessful moments—have certainly

changed who I am as a teacher. Because teaching is not simply an occupation for me, but rather a vocation that demands a high degree of commitment, compassion, and grace and consideration when addressing experienced educators, I am better prepared to improve my instructional methods based on what I learned from my experiences.

"Utang nga Buot" is my unique way of expressing my deep and sincere appreciation to all the people who have helped me and supported me along my journey in education/currently as an educator, including my professors, mentors, and family members. This is a very personal reminder that as a teacher, I am providing an example of all their support, nurturing, and wisdom by following the guidance they have given me and allowing my students to experience the same, all my ways of providing them the same compassion and support to assist them in growing as I once grew.

Subtheme 4.1. The Hands That Fed and Clothed Me

This theme is a tribute to the real grace I was given. In addition to scholarships, my education was funded by the actual "hands" of teachers who saw my need and quietly filled it. I remember being given an exact weight of rice in secret and being able to approach school with dignity thanks to the warmth of hand-me-down clothes. These acts were lifelines, not merely acts of charity. Since a teacher's influence is sometimes measured more by the silent, unseen provision of basic needs than by grades, I treasure the memory of this compassion as a sacred duty.

"E mga maestra ko kagto hay mahingay lang ka akong mga magurang ginapakaon nanada ako ag ginataw-an ka lambong."

Moreover, I view my role as an advocate for struggling students in terms of poverty and sense of belonging, and this sense of obligation forms a pedagogy of connection and healing. Consequently, my approach to teaching can be defined as biographical; I assist in establishing a friendlier environment by drawing on my own experience as a living repository of resilience in front of my students. Yazan and Keles (2024) defend this strategy by claiming that the resilience and professional integrity

of the teacher are also based on their capacity to use narrative to make sense of personal issues. Moreover, my commitment to this style of teaching goes in line with the results of Ragoonaden et al. (2025), who argue that the creation of effective cultural and emotional relationships significantly enhances student performance and the well-being of teachers. Eventually, Utang nga Buot ensures that professional efficacy is grounded in a mutually beneficial relationship that proves the fact that the personal history of a teacher is a powerful tool of academic and social transformation.

I recall having a desire to support my parents; therefore, I requested my counselors whether they required the help. My English teacher, Mrs. Angielyn Pallaya, was the person who took me in during my sophomore year. She promised to reimburse my educational fees and allowance in exchange for doing the household chores, such as cleaning the house, laundry, and other household duties. Although I tried my best, I had a deep attachment to my family in my heart. After two weeks, the homesickness was too heavy. I miss the countryside, my parents, and my siblings. Eventually, I decided to return home. I chose the tough option of discussing my issues with my family rather than working on them myself.

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This sub-theme shows how I went out of my way to interact with my pupils beyond the normal classroom environment. I found out that instruction often requires initiative and ingenuity to bridge knowledge gaps in understanding, trust, or access through minute, purposeful actions, like altering classes, learning their language, or establishing enabling environments. These programs became an opportunity for my personal growth as a teacher and the promotion of student cognition and confidence.

Subtheme 4.2. Mothering the Vulnerable Students, I Once Was

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As I look at my students' faces, I recognize my own image from years ago, and therefore, my class is a reflection of me. "Mothering" in this context serves as a reactive rescue, not simply as a function of a role.

Comforting a frightened child or feeding a hungry one, is actually me raising the child I once was. My intense feeling of being a mother reflects a personal reclamation of my own, as well as a professional obligation. I can end the cycle of being neglected by providing them with the protection that I once required, and therefore assure that they do not struggle with the same feelings of helplessness and insecurity that I did throughout my childhood.

"I pagtudo ka kindergarten nagakinahanglan gid it pirming pagdipara kanada mahingay ka imong mang bata." ("Teaching kindergarten requires constant care... almost like being a second mother.")

Teachers of kindergarten have particular difficulties. As if you were their second mother, they need constant care and attention. To ensure that children are not scared when their parents leave them at school, you must get to know each child on an individual basis, including their behavior, concerns, and strengths. You turn into a refuge for them. You comfort them when they cry. You hold their hand when they can't grip a pencil. The thrill is seeing them develop right before your eyes, but it's a chore that requires endless patience.

"Gin-trato ko e mga estudyante ko it irog ka akong bata agud indi sanda mahadluk nga ga sulod sa eskuylahan."

Because my interest has always been teaching young children. I handled them as if they were my own kids. Compared to higher-grade pupils, who were often challenging or rude, they were easy to converse with. And when they sense your affection, they return the favor. I realized that the care I experienced from my teachers in Aklan had given me a seed, and that it was now my responsibility in Quirino to nurture that seed in the lives of my own pupils.

Theme #5 - "Paghimo sa Dalan" (Teacher Intervention)

"Paghimo sa Dalan" (Making a Way) is the active equivalent of "Kalisud" (Hardship) in my journey's language. It shows that active intervention has replaced passive endurance. I had to carve out my

own path as a volunteer teacher. This subject examines how I transformed structural shortcomings into teaching opportunities, proving that the teacher's agency begins at the end of the road.

Subtheme 5.1. Bridging the Distance with My Own Initiatives

This sub theme shows how I had gone out of my way to interact with my pupils beyond the normal classroom environment. I found out that instruction often requires initiative and ingenuity to bridge knowledge gaps in understanding, trust, or access through minute, purposeful actions, like altering classes, learning their language, or establishing enabling environments. These programs became an opportunity of my personal growth as a teacher and the promotion of student cognition and confidence.

“Gaturugan kami sa uringan kagto agud mabuhi lang.” / “Naggamit ako it walkie-talkie agud makatudo sa tunga it pandemya.”

Subtheme 5.2: Standing Tall Against the Systems that Rejected Me

"Paghimo sa Dalan" (Making a Way) is a theme that reflects my proactive agency and innovative approaches to overcoming environmental and structural obstacles in education. This was particularly evident during the worldwide pandemic, when my students were at risk of being marginalized due to a lack of internet access in remote areas. I demonstrated the flexible instructional leadership needed under challenging circumstances by delivering courses utilizing alternative technologies, such as walkie-talkies. Villaver's (2024) findings, which highlight the necessity of teacher agency in navigating varied and resource-constrained contexts to sustain learning continuity, are consistent with this localized intervention. My resolve to allow geographic remoteness to hinder learning demonstrates a commitment to student achievement that goes beyond the standard curriculum.

This subject also examines my function as an advocate and cultural mediator in the educational system. "Paghimo sa Dalan" included establishing a "narrative space" in which my pupils' varied origins were not only recognized but also incorporated into

the educational process. Zen, Ropo, and Kupila (2022) assert that these areas are essential for instructors and students to rebuild their identities and discover purpose inside the classroom. By standing firm against traditional patronage and advocating for merit-based support for my students, I managed the "identity tensions" often faced by educators in complex social systems, as discussed by Yazan and Keles (2024). Ultimately, this theme highlights that effective teacher intervention is an act of resilience--an intentional effort to pave a path for learners where none previously existed.

Years later, the same survival instinct was activated during the pandemic. In the isolated slopes of Quirino, there was no internet signal. Modules were difficult to distribute. So, I used two-way radios and walkie-talkies. I would hike to a high location with a clear signal and broadcast my voice to my students in their houses. It was unorthodox, but it worked. I learnt that if you genuinely want to teach, you will find a way.

This subtheme depicts my experience breaking through institutional and societal hurdles to rethink my role as a teacher. When faced with rejection, skepticism, or strict institutions, I learnt resilience, persistence, and the value of advocating for myself and my pupils. These trials taught me strength and tenacity, transforming me into an educator who not only overcomes barriers but also turns them into chances for growth and meaningful influence.

“Naging una ako sa ranking pero waay ako dayon mabuoy... pero waay ako nagpadaug sa sistema.”

I had high hopes when I applied for a teaching post, and I was chosen first. I felt that at last my efforts had been acknowledged. However, the system was severe. I was not employed right away, even though I was a senior. I saw people with lesser scores get hired because of "connections" or "backers." It was a personal encounter with crony politics and palakasan, a harsh lesson in injustice. I felt disappointed and wondered if the situation was fair. But I wouldn't allow it to stop me. I prayed, waited, and continued to be committed to my path. My chance eventually presented itself.

That interaction was a turning point. It demonstrated to me that although technologies may malfunction, human integrity and tenacity cannot be compromised. It helped me become the capable and enthusiastic educator I am today, someone who knows how to maintain a commitment to justice, resiliency, and meaningful service for my kids while remaining firm and patient.

According to the study, a teacher is not a "blank slate" but rather a "living archive" of their cultural histories, personal problems, and spiritual faith. The following important conclusions are drawn from this autoethnographic journey: **Identity as a Fluid "Tapestry":** Professional identity is constantly reconstructed through life-altering ruptures, such as displacement and the ensuing negotiation between original heritage and a dominant new culture. **Emic Foundations of Philosophy:** Educational philosophies are deeply "emic" (insider-focused). Since a teacher's pedagogical worldview is directly derived from the values passed down by their community and elders, they cannot be genuinely sensitive to the cultures of their students without first being reflective of their own history. **Reflexive Advocacy:** Teaching is not just the mechanical delivery of curriculum; it is a relational practice mediated by culture. Pedagogy becomes an act of advocacy at the crossroads of self and culture, wherein the teacher's own Sugidanon must be validated to honor and validate the different narratives of their students.

Implications

The insights gained from this journey have major consequences for teacher formation, policy formulation, and classroom practice. Incorporating "Memory Work" in Professional formulation: Teacher education must go beyond technical training to assist educators' "inner lives." Programs should provide safe spaces for "Memory Work," allowing teachers to explore their own stories, traumas, and triumphs as professional assets that build essential empathy and resilience. Moving to Biographical Cultural Responsiveness: Policymakers and administrators should recognize that "culture" in

education is the "living archive" of the teacher, rather than just surface-level festivals or costumes.

Curriculum development should legitimize "insider" perspectives and local community values (such as bayanihan) as educational philosophies. Educators are encouraged to use their personal backgrounds and cultural "intersections" as powerful tools for connection. Teachers who freely integrate their own stories into their professional commitment create inclusive classrooms that serve as spaces of healing and belonging for children who may feel like "strangers".

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