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Teaching at the Margins: Semiotics, Power, and Meaning in the Lived Experience of an Island Teacher

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Abstract: Teaching on a remote island is rarely understood as a site of intellectual rigour, civic commitment, and quiet transformation. This study challenges that assumption by exploring the lived experience of one teacher navigating the entangled forces of semiotics, power, and marginality within an island setting in the central Philippines. Drawing on phenomenological, interpretivist, and critical paradigms and employing a casual interview alongside document analysis of teaching artefacts, this study examines how pedagogical signs, symbols, and practices reveal an island teacher's deeper values about care, identity, civic-mindedness, and becoming. Theoretically anchored in semiotics, critical pedagogy, and postcolonial and island studies perspectives, the analysis surfaces three interconnected findings: that marginality is lived as adaptability, initiative, and resourcefulness in response to chronic scarcity; that teaching artefacts function as coherent sign systems illustrating civic responsibility, ethical formation, and community embeddedness; and that professional identity is continuously negotiated through the competing demands of institutional power, local culture, and environmental precarity. Crucially speaking, this study does not frame island teaching as deficit-driven. Instead, it foregrounds how a teacher at geographical, peripheral and epistemic margins converts structural constraints into meaningful, context-responsive pedagogy, thus repositioning the classroom as a critical space where local knowledge is legitimised, student voice is cultivated, human agency is pursued, and dominant educational hierarchies are quietly but persistently contested. The island, in this sense, is not merely a backdrop but an active semiotic landscape that shapes what teaching can mean, and what it can become.

Keywords: island teaching, semiotics, marginality, critical pedagogy, teacher identity

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Introduction

Biliran Island faces the strong winds and turbulent waters of the Pacific Ocean. It is located north of Leyte in the central Philippines. It occupies a distinctive geographical position in Eastern Visayas, separated from mainland Leyte by a narrow strait, making it relatively remote and distant, and lately is confronted with socioeconomic challenges due to recent engineering or structural constraints of its lone bridge (Biliran Bridge) that is a vital conduit connecting nearby regions of Tacloban, Ormoc, Samar and Southern Leyte for socio-economic activity. This has led to limited access and transport to and from the island, amplifying the island's struggling economic flow (GMA Integrated News, 2024), along with poor infrastructure and seemingly laissez-faire local governance.

However, as an island province, it prides itself on having primary schools and high schools even in remote areas of the island, as well as a lone university, all of which are situated within layered forms of peripherality, physically removed from major urban financial centres, distanced from mainstream schools and universities of the country, exposed to seasonal yet destructive weather patterns, and dependent on ferry crossings, fragile road networks, power outages, and unstable and uneven internet connectivity (Meniano, 2025; Philippine News Agency, [PNA], 2024).

This spatio-geographical condition of the island shapes the academic life of the island teacher in unique and challenging ways, where access to resources, professional networks, and scholarly exchange is mediated by a slow and seemingly idiosyncratic way of life, disruptive weather conditions, and other contingencies and unforeseen circumstances of island living and mobility. The students on the island confront torrential rains that interrupt schooling as they navigate turbulent seas, thick mountains and complex terrains that cradle their communities not only in abundance of natural resources but also in isolation. Coconut groves, rice paddies, geothermal springs, falls, and rivers, along with tropical oceans, coexist with intermittent internet signals and fragile roads and highways that easily yield to mudslides, landslides, and flash floods, affecting local business operations, schooling, and the day-to-day life of the people. On this island, distance is not merely physical or geographical, but also pedagogical and symbolic to both the students' and the teachers' existence with the world, reflecting how geography, infrastructure, and vulnerability shape educational access and lived experience in remote, archipelagic contexts (Bankoff, 2003; David, 2017).

The island prides itself on a single university that serves as the local educational backbone and a symbolic gateway to global systems of knowledge and to employment opportunities beyond the island. The university is instrumental in producing teacher education graduates who help embolden the education system of the island, as well as making a difference in the lives of children through teaching. The university also situates itself at the intersection of cultural rootedness and unique aspiration, deeply embedded in rural, agricultural, and coastal communities, yet tasked with aligning itself to national and international higher education standards due to the pressure of becoming a globalised higher education institution, a common ideal that peripheral universities aspire for (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Marginson, 2016). This tension renders the lone university a liminal space, where global academic discourses are revised or reinterpreted through island realities, and where teaching and learning are inseparable from the local geography, culture, and

everyday vulnerabilities of island life, reflecting how peripheral institutions negotiate global flows of knowledge while remaining grounded in their unique local contexts and needs (Shore & Wright, 2015; Tikly, 2004). This tension also draws attention to how a teacher lives their personal and professional lives operating in such a space where the struggles of island life are intertwined with their silent dreams, aspirations, and what-ifs.

To teach in remote schools on an island is to understand that one inhabits an important paradox of life. For example, the island's higher education institution constantly carries the aspirations of how to become "globalised", represented by their desire to meet the benchmarks of outcomes-based education, international accreditation standards, internationally-acclaimed research outputs, higher passing rates of graduates that meet international employment schemes, and state-of-the-art digital learning management systems, while being firmly rooted in locally bounded meanings, habits, practices, constraints, inadequacies, and struggles (Altbach & Knight, 2007; de Wit, et al., 2015). The typical life of a teacher navigating his day-to-day existence on the island unfolds between ferry schedules or mountain treks and classroom teaching (considering that some teachers live in some islets surrounding Biliran island, or far away in the mountains), between *habal-habal* or *sikad-sikad* transport and faculty meetings, between torrential rains and massive flooding and field work, or between printed handouts and online learning portals that may or may not load due to poor internet connectivity. Such conditions reflect the realities of a teacher's life in geographically fragmented and infrastructurally vulnerable island settings, where mobility, weather, and unstable access to resources directly shape teaching and learning (Akmad & Abatayo, 2024; Pinca, 2015). In classrooms where students speak Waray-Waray, Cebuano, Filipino, or English in fluid code-switching finesse, teaching becomes an act of translation and a space for interpretation and sensemaking because it emerges not only linguistic and instructional, but also deeply cultural, social, political, critical, ideological, and semiotic.

Within an island province, semiotics, power, and marginality converge in the everyday practices of teaching, rendering teaching, which is viewed as a noble craft, a deeply political and symbolic act. The teacher confronts the forces of power as something intimate and unavoidable, embedded in their everyday pedagogical choices in relation to top-down institutional rules, policies and ideologies (Foucault, 1977, 1980; Shore & Wright, 2015). Politics and power surface through centralised curricula and assessment, uneven resource allocation, and bureaucratic mandates that often fail to account for the island's material limitations and local cultures and knowledges, and the unique circumstances of both the teacher and student who are living another day, trying to survive a difficult island life (Giroux, 2014; Tikly, 2004). Authority also subtly permeates institutional practices, such as who gets to define established, legitimate knowledge, who gets to assess, and at times, undermine emerging or evolving knowledge, which languages are accepted in classroom teaching, and whose experiences, methods and teaching strategies are rendered central and peripheral. Teaching thus constantly becomes a negotiated and contested act of survival, where compliance and resistance to disabling institutional power coexist in the effort to make learning meaningful for both teachers and students living at the margins.

The lesson materials a teacher uses, the languages privileged or disadvantaged in the classroom, and the pacing of lessons amid different disruptions all function as signs that

negotiate authority, care, civic duty, and moral grounding. Institutional symbols such as curricula, syllabi and lesson plans aligned with national benchmarks, digital learning platforms signalling global legitimacy, and the apparent strong mandate to use English as the language of academic discourse carry forms and forces of power that often originate from colonial history (Phillipson, 1992). Yet these factors are continuously reconstructed and contested in practice within the unique spaces of learning and teaching on the island, as teachers feel the need to adapt, translate, and humanise them, and at times submit to subservience just to fit their local conditions and ensure that systems and structures are in place for the students amid the material and structural challenges of life such as those conditions of precarity and vulnerability (de Certeau, 1984; Shore & Wright, 2015; Spivak, 1988). In short, marginality here is not merely spatial but epistemic, i.e., island knowledge, student lifeworlds, and the teacher's emotional labour sit at the edges of formal academic discourse, scholarly pursuits, and institutional systems of power, regardless of the unique struggles and sacrifices a teacher faces day by day. Teaching thus becomes an act of semiotic mediation, in which power is exercised through the pitted tension between rigid enforcement of institutional and external standards and moral and ethical responsiveness that an island teacher needs to respond to (Kress, 2010; Peirce, 1931–1958), because of an important goal that they must heed: to enable local, island-based pedagogies to assert meaning, dignity, voice, legitimacy, and autonomy within, and sometimes against, global educational systems and structures as dominant forces of power.

This study, therefore, explores the lived experience of an island teacher through the theoretical lenses of semiotics, critical theory, critical pedagogy, and marginality. This study does not view or frame island teaching as deficit-driven; rather, it attempts to foreground the meaning-making practices and ideological and epistemological frames of a teacher teaching on a remote island, i.e., how signs, symbols, artefacts, and pedagogical rituals reveal an island teacher's deeper values about care, commitment, identity, sense of self, and becoming in a remote space and place filled with aspirations and voices, as well as struggles, fears and anxieties. This study also attempts to explore the deeply intertwined relationship of politics or forms of institutional power and local rituals, constraints, and culture that shape the island teacher's professional identity, sense of self, and becoming. The island, in this sense, is not simply a geographical backdrop or a physical space where teaching occurs. The island itself is viewed as an active semiotic landscape that shapes what teaching can mean, how authority and power are exercised in spaces of learning, and how global and national educational discourses and standardised frameworks are reconstructed and reworked at the margins.

Literature Review

In this section, we present a review of studies that discuss the entangled relationship between semiotics and island teaching, power, authority, critical ideologies, and institutional discourses, and marginality and islandness that construct an island teacher's identity, sense of belonging, and becoming.

Semiotics and Island Teaching

Semiotics and island teaching intersect in illuminating ways, as the study of signs and meaning-making provides a powerful framework for understanding how teaching practices, material and environmental conditions, sense of space and place, linguistic choices, and assessment parameters within an island's education landscape construct and communicate narratives of authority, marginality, care, civic-mindedness and sense of belonging.

Semiotics is the intersubjective mediation by signs for which meanings and meaning-making are central to arriving at a deeper understanding of phenomena (Craig, 1999; Saussure, 2011; Peirce, 1958). Semiotics positions teaching as a dynamic system of signs in which language choices, classroom artefacts, gestures, technologies, assessment tools, and feedback practices all function as signifiers that communicate implicit pedagogical values. Within educational contexts, scholars have shown that teaching materials, including PowerPoint slides, modules or course guides, syllabi, assessment rubrics, and learning management systems, do more than deliver content; they encode and represent assumptions about authority, temporality, participation, and what counts as legitimate knowledge (Barthes, 1972; Chandler, 2017). The classroom itself operates as a semiotic space in which spatial arrangements (e.g., how chairs are arranged against the classroom podium or stage where teachers mostly position themselves), modes of address, linguistic or communicative nuances, classroom practices, and even silence participate in meaning-making.

In multilingual environments, code-switching and translanguaging further complicate this terrain, exposing the tension between institutional language policies and the lived communicative practices of students coming from the different parts of the island. Meaning in teaching, therefore, is not neutral; rather, it is structured, layered, and embedded in systems of signification that reflect broader cultural and ideological formations. When this semiotic lens is brought into island pedagogy, the landscape itself becomes a powerful signifier. Island studies scholars argue that islands are frequently constructed within dominant pedagogical discourses as peripheral, small, dependent, deficient or lacking, emerging as categories that are not merely descriptive but semiotically loaded (Baldacchino, 2007; Connell, 2013). These representations shape expectations of institutional capacity and academic legitimacy. Within the education contexts in an island setting, the modest scale of campuses, the proximity between faculty and students, and the visibility of resource constraints can be read as signs of marginality through a mainland-focused, mainstream, or canonical viewpoint. Yet semiotically, these same features may also signify intimacy, attachment, accountability, and relational pedagogy. Relations and culture, in general, in island teaching are close-knit. Therefore, semiotically speaking, the island teacher and students engage in more intimate relational dynamics driven by warmth, care, and a strong sense of belonging and community. Thus, island teaching operates within a contested symbolic space as it is seemingly interpreted simultaneously as deficit and as distinctiveness, or as limitation and as groundedness.

Material conditions in island and rural education further shape the semiotic character of pedagogy. In contexts where internet connectivity is unstable and institutional funding is limited, printed modules, photocopied readings, and handwritten annotations often remain central and are "prized" possessions in instructional practice. Rather than being merely compensatory tools, these material artefacts acquire heightened symbolic

weight, close enough to the mind and soul of the island teacher. A carefully prepared printed module may signal reliability, care, and pedagogical commitment, and detailed handwritten feedback may function as a sign of presence, attentiveness, commitment, and compassion in environments where digital immediacy is not guaranteed. From a semiotic perspective, scarcity reshapes the hierarchy of signs in that what might be considered outdated elsewhere (e.g., printed modules are no longer the practice in mainstream universities in big cities) remains meaningful, valuable, and emotionally charged within the island context (Kress, 2010; van Leeuwen, 2005). These practices construct a pedagogy of relationality, where teaching is not only the transmission of information but also the visible enactment of care, commitment, and dedication to the craft (Noddings, 2013).

Moreover, semiotics illuminates how island teachers navigate the interplay between global academic discourses and local knowledge systems. Curricula, citation practices, and research agendas often reflect metropolitan, canonical epistemologies, signalling alignment with international standards and the legitimacy of scholarly publications. However, island educators may embed local histories, vernacular narratives, and unique cultural habits, rituals, and community issues into their teaching, producing seemingly hybrid pedagogical texts that negotiate between where the centre is and where the periphery is. At times, these locally grounded knowledges may also come into tension with dominant international scholarly frameworks. In this sense, island pedagogy becomes a site of semiotic translation and re-interpretation, where global symbols of academic authority intersect with locally grounded meanings and significations (Hall, 1997). By reading teaching as a layered system of signs (textual, spatial, material, or affective), semiotics provides a rigorous framework for understanding how island educators construct authority, express care and compassion, and contest power and marginality within the everyday practices of island educators operating in peripheral margins.

Power, Authority, and Institutional Discourse

Power in higher education does not reside solely in formal leadership or policy documents; it permeates discourses that define what counts as legitimate knowledge, credible scholarship, and acceptable pedagogy (Foucault, 1977, 1980), and what counts as "good" or "effective" teaching. Institutional authority is exercised through curriculum frameworks, accreditation mechanisms, quality assurance systems, and audit cultures that promote particular standards of excellence while seemingly marginalising others (Ball, 2012). In island institutions, these aspects that define accountability are rarely locally generated; rather, they are frequently shaped by national agencies or ministries that create educational policies, establish international ranking systems, and uphold global education benchmarks that position peripheral institutions within hierarchies of comparison, at times viewed as deficient, marginalised or inferior (Shore & Wright, 2015; Baldacchino, 2010). As a result, pedagogical practice becomes entangled with broader governmental frameworks, where teaching is evaluated not for its relational, situational, cultural and intellectual value and unique positioning, but for its measurable outputs, documentation, and compliance with external, national or international norms.

These dynamics are intensified by neoliberal transformations in higher education, which recast universities as competitive, globalised, and performance-driven enterprises

(Giroux, 2014; Shore & Wright, 2015). Discourses of internationalisation, digitisation, efficiency, and productivity are viewed in peripheral contexts as seemingly universal imperatives, yet they often carry assumptions rooted in mainstream perspectives and resource abundance, putting island universities in relatively difficult marginal situations. For instance, for island educators, such discourses may create a dissonance between policy rhetoric and lived realities. The demand to integrate sophisticated digital platforms, produce internationally indexed research, or align teaching with global competencies can obscure the infrastructural fragilities and sociocultural specificities of island settings, such as intermittent and unstable internet connectivity, power outages, limited transportation routes dependent on weather conditions, and restricted access to libraries and laboratories for the production of knowledge, not to mention the strong kinship networks that shape institutional decision-making, multilingual classroom dynamics, unique cultural habits and rituals, and deeply embedded community expectations that pervade the local culture of island teaching. Thus, power in island teaching operates discursively: it frames what is desirable, modern, or progressive as core to teaching, while subtly positioning local adaptations and unique processes as deficiencies rather than contextually intelligent, agentive, and impactful responses. Unfortunately, the very people holding institutional power, who resonate with the uniqueness and the challenges of island teaching, are contributing to these unfair power dynamics that keep pushing the island teacher to the periphery, depriving them of the capacity for enhanced agency, autonomy, and voice.

At the level of everyday practice, however, power and authority are negotiated in more intimate and contingent ways. Research informed by critical pedagogy demonstrates that teachers are not passive recipients of institutional power; rather, they interpret, resist, and reconfigure it through the decisions they make in the classroom (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1988). Choices about how strictly to adhere to standardised syllabi, whether to modify assessment timelines in response to typhoons or transportation disruptions, or how to balance formal grading criteria that are deeply influenced by standard deviation with constructive, compassionate feedback, reveal the moral and relational dimensions of power and authority. Feedback practices, in particular, become sites where evaluative judgment intersects with care and compassion, which are emotions emerging from the strong kinship in localised island settings, e.g., the island teacher following a context-sensitive assessment grounded in student precarity in response to socio-economic hardships (e.g., students would rather sail out to sea for food instead of going to campus because the need for survival is a more important priority than schooling and a university degree). In marginal settings, the authority to grade may be tempered by a recognition of shared vulnerability, thereby constructing what might be described as the moral compass of teaching, one that privileges relational accountability and communal spirit and survival over bureaucratic rigidity constituted by national and international curriculum standards that, at times, dehumanise the learner.

Institutional discourses also shape teacher identity, positioning island educators within narratives of legitimacy and marginality. Through performance appraisals, research expectations, and promotion criteria, institutions codify particular models of the "ideal academic", one that is often aligned with research-intensive norms (Ball, 2012; Shore & Wright, 2015). Island teachers may therefore experience a tension between institutionalised

ideals of efficiency, effectiveness, and research productivity and their lived commitments to intensive teaching, community or civic engagement, and cultural relations. Yet this tension is not merely restrictive and limiting the island teacher's capacities; it can also generate critical awareness. By recognising how authority is structured through discourse, island educators may carve out spaces of pedagogical autonomy, asserting locally grounded knowledge and relational forms of expertise as valid, legitimate, and necessary. Discourse here, in its Foucauldian sense, affirms that it is a system of possibilities for the creation of knowledge and meaning. In this sense, if island teachers strengthen the resolve to carve out spaces of pedagogical autonomy, asserting locally grounded knowledge and relational forms of expertise produced and reproduced through shared island practices, then power is not constraining but productive as it affords possibilities within which island teachers negotiate, reinterpret, and sometimes subtly transform institutional expectations to fit their unique needs, and the needs of students.

Marginality, Islandness, and Teacher Identity

The concepts of marginality and islandness are central to understanding teacher identity in peripheral contexts, as educators working within island institutions continuously negotiate between externally imposed representations of "smallness" or limitations, and internally cultivated narratives of resilience, relationality, and sense of belonging.

Marginality has been theorised not only as exclusion but as a productive space where alternative epistemologies and pedagogies emerge. Island studies emphasise "islandness" as a condition marked by boundedness, interdependence, and heightened awareness of limitations. For island teachers, this can foster a strong identification with students' struggles, dreams, and aspirations. For instance, empirical studies of teachers in remote contexts in the Philippines describe a deep, intertwined relationship between professional and personal identities. Teaching diaries, reflective journals, and informal logs often reveal a philosophy of teaching grounded in *serbisyo* (service), *malasakit* (care or compassion), *tiyaga* (perseverance), and *lakas ng loob* (inner will or courage), values that resonate strongly with broader Filipino cultural, psychological, and ethical frameworks (Enriquez, 1992; Mercado, 1974). These dispositions are enacted through everyday pedagogical choices illustrated in extended deadlines of assignments due to ferry/boat cancellations and illness, modified assessments after typhoons and flooding, or blending Western theories of civic education with locally grounded examples drawn from fishing, farming or agriculture, healthcare provision for people in the mountains and islets, and poverty or labour narratives.

Marginality has long been used to describe how teachers working in "peripheral" sites considered as rural, minority, or politically and economically de-centred systems experience their professional selves as shaped through unequal relations of recognition, resources, autonomy and voice. Across teacher-identity scholarship, identity is understood as dynamic, relational, and continuously negotiated and contested within power-laden contexts rather than a stable attribute of individuals (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Day & Kington, 2008). Policy and accountability regimes can intensify marginality by positioning island teachers as implementers of externally defined "quality" and "standards," often narrowing professional agency and redefining professionalism through managerial logics (Sachs, 2005). In peripheral settings, these pressures can be felt more sharply because

teachers frequently work closer to the edge of the systems, where staffing, specialist knowledge provisions, and professional learning or development opportunities are thinner or scarcer, making identity work inseparable from questions of access, status, and legitimacy (Crossley, 2014; Varghese et al., 2005).

Islandness adds a distinctive spatial-cultural layer to marginality because it suggests not only geographic separation but also an experiential condition produced through mobility constraints, strong social bonds, and a constant comparison to mainland, national, and mainstream norms. Contemporary islandness literature emphasises that islandness is contested and politically charged in that islands are routinely represented from the outside as "small," "limited," or "isolated," even if island scholarship cautions against essentialising or reducing islands to vulnerability or deficiency narratives (Foley, 2023; Nimführ, 2020). Relational and connectivity-oriented accounts further show that islandness is co-constituted through networks, flows, and infrastructural ties, complicating the seemingly simplistic centre–periphery binaries (Grydehøj & Casagrande, 2020). For example, in postcolonial and Indigenous Pacific thought, the reframing of Oceania as a "sea of islands" directly challenges deficit imaginaries by foregrounding mobility, interdependence, and expansive place-based identity, which is an intellectual move that is highly generative for thinking about education and teacher identity beyond "smallness" and "deficiency-driven" framing (Hauʻofa, 1994).

When these strands meet, teacher identity in island institutions can be read as a space of an ongoing negotiation between externally imposed representations of limitation and internally cultivated narratives of resilience, relationality, and belonging. Teachers' professional selves or identities are formed in interaction with community expectations and the "intimacy" of island social life, where visibility is high and professional, and personal and civic roles are often overlapping conditions that can intensify both support and surveillance. Empirical work on remote island teachers' professional learning, for example, highlights how island educators develop identity through place-based practice and collegial networks that counter isolation while also reflecting the realities of small, and at times, vulnerable professional communities (Dick & Burns, 2022). In Indonesia, for example, island-context teacher-identity studies point to identity formations grounded in moral service to community alongside tensions produced by changing policy, technology, and generational shifts (Taopan et al., 2026). Here, marginality is not only experienced as a disadvantage but is also reworked through locally meaningful commitments to place-making, social responsibility, and collegial professionalism.

A useful synthesis is to conceptualise island teacher identity as dialogic and place-oriented in that teachers position themselves across multiple "voices" (e.g., policy, community, nation, profession, and islandness), sometimes aligning with deficit discourses and sometimes actively resisting them through narratives of competence, care, and local or indigenous expertise (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Foley, 2023). This lens also clarifies why island teachers may simultaneously seek outward mobility (e.g., pursuing credentials, networks, excellence, and outsider recognition) and deepen inward belonging (e.g., community embeddedness, linguistic/cultural continuity, and stewardship of place). This suggests moving beyond treating islands as merely "remote sites" and instead analysing how islandness is produced through everyday educational relations that drive conversations

as to who defines quality, whose knowledge counts, and how teachers convert structural constraints into situated forms of autonomy, agency and resilience (Crossley, 2014; Nimführ, 2020). In conclusion, marginality and islandness are central to the creation of teacher identity, not because they predetermine teacher identity, but because they structure the representational and material conditions through which teachers in peripheral island contexts must continually rewrite or re-author who they are, how they think about the world, and what teaching means to them.

Research Questions

In this study, we attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What do pedagogical signs, symbols, artefacts, and practices of an island teacher reveal about underlying values, beliefs and assumptions of teaching in a remote island context?
2. How does a teacher, teaching on a remote island, experience and view teaching or the life of a teacher through the lens of semiotics, power, and marginality?
3. How does the intertwined relationship of institutional power and local practices, constraints, and culture shape the island teacher's professional identity, sense of self, belonging, and becoming?

Methodology

This study adopts a phenomenological, interpretivist, and critical approach that focuses on describing and analysing the lived experience of one island teacher who is confronted with the entangled forces of power and politics of an institution and is faced with the reality about how he finds meaning in his teaching craft while living at the margins.

Research Paradigms

This study is a deeply qualitative inquiry situated within phenomenological, interpretivist, and critical paradigms. The study foregrounds lived experience, meaning-making, and power dynamics that an island teacher deals with in his institutional context. For an island teacher, this means treating place, isolation, and marginality not as background variables but as constitutive of grounded experience. Phenomenology (to understand lived experience, and the dialogue of the self with the world), critical pedagogy (to examine power dynamics), semiotics (to read meaning in practices, spaces, and language), and postcolonial or island studies perspectives (to situate and problematise marginality) constitute the study's entangled frames of reference, explaining how power, lived experience, discourse, and meaning are understood, and why these lenses are appropriate for studying teaching at the margins.

Phenomenology centres on the framework of lived experience, i.e., how reality is perceived, felt, and made meaningful from the first-person point of view (Husserl, 1970; Merleau-Ponty, 2012; van Manen, 1990). In studying the life of a teacher on an island, phenomenology seeks to bracket abstract assumptions and instead attend closely to the rhythms and struggles of daily life: the embodied experience of crossing rough seas to reach the school campus, the emotional weight of teaching big cohorts of students, the solitude of academic work in geographically isolated spaces, and the intimate relationships formed

within close-knit communities (Heidegger, 1962; van Manen, 1990). Rather than reducing island teaching to institutional metrics, policy categories or statistics, this framework privileges voice, memory, temporality, and affect, illuminating how meaning is constituted through everyday encounters with students, colleagues, communities and geographical landscape (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). It allows the study to capture not just what the teacher does, but how teaching at the margins is experienced as both vocation and belonging, as well as burden and resistance.

Critical pedagogy, on the other hand, interrogates how education is shaped by power relations, ideology, and structural inequalities (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1988; McLaren, 2015). Applied to an island teaching context, it examines how global academic hierarchies, top-down international standards, funding disparities, teaching methodologies, and linguistic norms may marginalise peripheral institutions and their educators (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1988). It asks whose knowledge counts, whose voices are amplified or silenced, and how teachers navigate or challenge systems that position them as "less than" their mainland or mainstream counterparts (McLaren, 2015). Through this lens, the island teacher is not merely an instructor but a critical agent negotiating authority, scarcity, civic or community expectations, and institutional constraints. Critical pedagogy reveals how teaching at the margins can become a site of conscientization where educators and students alike develop critical awareness of their socio-economic, sociocultural and geopolitical positioning, and potentially transform silence or discomfort into agency (Freire, 1970).

Furthermore, the employment of semiotics will help examine how meaning is produced and communicated through signs, symbols, rituals, habits, and spaces of interactions (Chandler, 2017; Peirce, 1958; Saussure, 2011). In the context of island teaching, this framework moves beyond spoken discourse to interpret the symbolic dimensions of academic life illustrated through the modest campus buildings facing the oceans or the mountains, the multilingual codes used in the classrooms, the teacher's syllabi, lesson plans and other teaching materials, ceremonial practices and rituals of the institution, the layout of offices, even the weather-worn textbooks passed from cohort to cohort (Barthes, 1972; Chandler, 2017). Each of these elements functions as a sign within a broader system of social, cultural and institutional meaning-making (Saussure, 2011). Semiotics allows the study to uncover how marginality, resilience, power, authority, and aspirations are encoded in everyday practices of the teacher and in their material environments. It reveals how the island itself becomes a powerful signifier shaping identity, shaping pedagogy, and shaping reality (ontology) and knowledge (epistemology) (Barthes, 1972).

Lastly, postcolonial and island studies perspectives situate the island university within histories of colonialism, economic dependency, geographic isolation, and centre–periphery relations (Bhabha, 1994; Baldacchino, 2007; Said, 1978). These frameworks challenge the notion that islands are merely remote or deficient spaces; instead, they examine how marginality is historically constructed through political, cultural, and epistemic discourses of domination (Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988). For a teacher teaching on an island, this lens illuminates how curricula, language policies, research agendas, and academic standards may still reflect colonial inheritances or innuendos, or top-down, mainland-centred paradigms (Bhabha, 1994). At the same time, island studies foreground the distinctiveness of island ecologies, relationality, and community interdependence,

reframing insularity not as a limitation but as a unique site of knowledge creation and knowledge production (Baldacchino, 2007; Connell, 2013). Together, these perspectives explain why teaching at the margins must be understood within broader global power structures while recognising the island as a dynamic, meaning-making space in its own right, with the scholars persistently reminding themselves to avoid looking at marginality as a deficiency.

Research Participant

Teacher "Ron" grew up in a coastal town east of Maripipi, an islet municipality within the territorial map of the island of Biliran. The Pacific Ocean that surrounds his town shaped both his livelihood and his imagination, and this unique geography and space continue to help him frame his life as an island educator. Graduating from college in the early 2000s, his entry into the world of teaching was driven by a belief that his success through education could disrupt the vicious cycle of marginality similar to those he once inhabited and experienced as a college student. He believed that his life and the life of his family would eventually move away from the margins through his job at one of the prominent educational institutions in mainland Naval, the capital of Biliran, an island province. Yet, similar to his life as an undergraduate student, his everyday life as a teacher is continually marked by persistent struggle represented in transient living, intermittent electricity and water supply, unstable internet, limited access to books and research materials, minimum wage for entry-level teachers, heavy teaching workload, epistemic injustice, and the geographical isolation that makes professional development opportunities seemingly feel distant and difficult to achieve. "It's hard to leave teaching and pursue a graduate scholarship elsewhere. I will lose my bread and butter, which is teaching. It's a gamble to make, and I am not prepared to do it when my parents and siblings depend on me for survival," he expressed during a casual interview. These material and professional constraints are compounded by the painful realities of island life itself, i.e., those boats that do not arrive on time, unpredictable weather that dictates ferry schedules, instant storms that disrupt sea and land travel, typhoons that destroy shelters, roads, and livelihood, and a constant negotiation between personal survival, professional growth, and institutional demands. Teaching, for Teacher Ron, is not only a pedagogical or rhetorical act driven by the intent to influence minds; it is an exercise in endurance, improvisation, initiative, resourcefulness, and a quiet dedication and commitment within those challenging conditions that rarely recognise his emotional and physical labour just so he could show up in his classroom to teach his students. "So much sacrifice is made, yet one remains unseen", he expressed.

Within the school in which he works, Teacher Ron navigates disabling power relations and entrenched politics that often silence new teachers like himself. Decisions are centralised, voices are unevenly heard, and academic worth is frequently measured by standards imported from national benchmarks created by the central agencies of education (e.g., the Department of Education or DepEd), rendering his context, work, and professional identity peripheral. He learns to speak with caution, to comply without question, and to carry dissent in silent colloquy because he is aware that resistance can jeopardise his stability and tenure in a place where employment options are not only scarce but deeply political.

Still, Teacher Ron holds tightly to his aspirations: to become a scholar whose work speaks from, rather than about, the margins; to teach students that their being "islanders" or their "island" experiences are sources of legitimate knowledge grounded in the realities of life, not deficits or disadvantages. These hopes are sustained quietly in his language and embodied morals, in his lesson plans shaped with care and nuanced attention to island life, in his moments of shared recognition of excellence with students, and in his deliberate silence, which does not suggest emptiness but is a strategy to speak one's worth and truth. In this silence, Teacher Ron preserves meaning, dignity, and the belief that teaching, even at the margins, can be an act of slow and patient transformation. "Out here, teaching is learning how to speak because we have an important thing to say, or to remain silent and face our own battles head on, still believing that the craft of teaching matters, that even in silence, and at times, being unseen, something valuable is worth fighting for, and that is to teach students how to navigate the world around them, and the world beyond, so that they become productive and useful citizens of the communities in which they will soon serve," he shared. "But when I have the chance to speak, either in the classroom or outside, or whether speaking as an educator or as a member of an administrative team, I will speak so that my students and other people can hear my views. I have learned to use my voice", he added.

Researcher Reflexivity and Researcher Positionality

Research reflexivity acknowledges that the researcher is never a neutral instrument but an active participant in the interpretation of data and the production of knowledge. It requires sustained critical self-examination of how personal history, values, assumptions, emotional responses, and even silences shape the framing of research questions, the interpretation of participants' narratives, and the representation of participants' voices. In studies of marginality or islandness, reflexivity becomes methodological rather than merely reflective; it is woven into the research process itself. As researchers, we continually interrogate how moments of empathy, discomfort, identification, or distance influence what is emphasised, what is softened, and what remains unspoken in the lived experience of our participant, the island teacher, Teacher "Ron". Reflexivity demands attentiveness to the ethical, social, and political dimensions of interpretation by recognising the possibility that how stories are told can either reproduce dominant hierarchies or create a space for counter-narratives to emerge.

Researcher positionality extends this reflexive stance by situating ourselves, as researchers, within specific social, cultural, institutional, and geopolitical situations that shape the island teacher's views and perspectives of teaching and of life in general. In this study, our long-term residence on the island, where both of us lived for most of our lives and spent a significant time of our professional careers, places us in a position of deep familiarity with the teaching context, enabling us to understand the views and sentiments of the research participant, Teacher Ron. We understand not only the geography and conditions of island life, but also the subtle cultural codes, educational constraints, and unspoken struggles and expectations that shape the work of a remote teacher in this unique setting. This insider experience allows us to interpret narratives with nuance and sensitivity, while also recognising the taken-for-granted realities that an external (or outsider)

researcher might overlook. At the same time, we remain critically aware that familiarity does not eliminate bias; rather, it requires heightened reflexivity to ensure that shared history and narratives with the participant enhance our intimacy with the study and strengthen our analysis and depth of interpretation. Articulating this positionality clarifies the relational dynamics through which knowledge is co-constructed and makes transparent the interpretive lens in which marginal lives or islandness, as a core concept and phenomenon in this study, is understood, represented, and interpreted with care driven by trustworthiness, reliability, and credibility.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations in this study were grounded in care, reflexivity, and the protection of a participant situated within a small and rural institutional context. The research involved a single adult participant imbued with maturity, agency and intelligence; nonetheless, ethical rigour was strictly observed throughout the data gathering process. Informed consent was obtained from Teacher Ron through an ongoing process of conversation rather than a one-time procedure, ensuring that he had full agency over his participation, his narratives, his stories, his ideas, and his representations through the pedagogical materials he shared during our interactions with him, and through the casual interview we conducted with him. The interview was informal and relaxed, mimicking the naturalness and spontaneity of how people talk in natural settings. Attention was given to confidentiality and anonymity, recognising the heightened risk of identification in an island education system where communities are close-knit and institutional power is concentrated at the top. A pseudonym was used, hence Teacher "Ron", and careful narrative selection from the casual interview was employed to prevent potential harm or professional repercussions. Beyond procedural ethics, this study prioritised relationality and respect to human dignity by honouring silence in conversations, sharing the written manuscript with Teacher Ron to seek his thoughts and feedback, and allowing revision of it at any stage with his knowledge, agreement, and consent. In this way, Teacher Ron's dignity as a participant and a human being was fully respected, illustrating that ethics functioned not merely as compliance but as a sustained commitment to fairness, openness, and honesty in studying a teacher's lived experience at the margins, and in capturing his worldviews about teaching and the world.

Data Gathering Procedures and Analysis Frameworks

The data analysed for this study were generated through a casual interview and a deck of teaching artefacts (1 course guide or syllabi of a course that Teacher Ron is teaching, and 2 lesson plans with his notes and annotations). A thematic analysis was conducted for his narratives from the casual interview, and a document analysis was conducted for his teaching artefacts.

Casual Interviews

Casual interviews are conversational exchanges that allow researchers to explore participants' meanings and interpretations in ways that remain open, flexible, respectful, and responsive to context, particularly within qualitative and hermeneutic inquiry (Anderson, 2014). Rather than following a rigid structure, such interviews encourage

dialogue in which experiences, reflections, and interpretations emerge through natural conversations. In this study, the interview (Appendix A) was conducted on Zoom, considering the different geographical locations between the researchers and Teacher Ron.

In a relaxed discussion with Teacher Ron, we asked how he experiences life as a teacher on an island. He described island teaching as both demanding and deeply meaningful, shaped by geographical isolation, limited resources, unpredictable weather conditions, and the close-knit relationships within the community, but he was appreciative of the beauty of the natural scenery of the island, away from polluted cities and the chaos of the world. According to him, teaching in this context requires patience and adaptability because students' lives are closely tied to the unique problems and challenges of island life, embodied in fishing, farming, family responsibilities, and hard labour due to poverty that interrupts regular schooling. Yet he emphasised that these same conditions cultivate a strong sense of connection among teachers, students, and the community, allowing learning to draw directly from what the island life offers. "My students are warm and hospitable… Very accommodating when you visit them at their homes to know how they are doing and coping with life. Despite the dearth in life, they will do their best to show you genuine hospitality through a decent meal," Teacher Ron shared during the interview.

The interview with Teacher Ron offers a nuanced, reflexive account of teaching within the constraints of an island context, foregrounding tensions between institutional mandates and pedagogical autonomy. He describes how top-down curricular shifts, such as the abrupt introduction of hybrid teaching modalities (online, distance e-learning), required him to compress and reconfigure his lessons within limited on-site and online timeframes, often without sufficient institutional readiness or clarity. This reveals a teaching practice shaped not only by pedagogical intentions but also by structural uncertainties and policy-driven demands. At the same time, Teacher Ron reflects on students' varied learning differences and conditions, including difficulties with reading, critical analysis, and writing, which he must continually navigate and address in his classroom instruction. His emphasis on maintaining the relevance of legitimate, ethical journalism, especially in contrast to unregulated social media, further highlights his commitment to critical literacy and disciplinary integrity. Taken together, the interview serves as a crucial conversation that exposes the lived realities of Teacher Ron and his students beyond the syllabus and lesson plans, illustrating how teacher agency is exercised through negotiation, adaptation, and principled decision-making in a context marked by institutional pressures and learning challenges.

Thematic Analysis and Coding

Our sensemaking of textual data, i.e., narrative data from the casual interview, was guided by the principles of thematic analysis. As a grounded theory methodology (Glaser and Strauss, 1999), thematic analysis requires qualitative researchers to code, a process of assigning value to a foundational text of words, an interaction, description, speech, narration, or conversation (Anderson, 2014). Coding invites researchers to engage in a tedious process of reading, rereading, and explicating narrative texts so that concepts, patterns, themes, and even anomalies will come to the fore. Such concepts and themes can be broken down into subthemes, or they can be brought to a higher level of categorisation by

coalescing them and creating overarching thematic concerns or splitting them up to see how subthemes can emerge. Anderson (2014) and Lindlof and Taylor (2011) called this process axial coding, in which researchers dig deep into textual data, make further categorizations of subthemes emerging from the narrative data, build connections, break down core themes into more specific and interconnected categories, find revealing patterns of thought, capture illuminating insights, and decide which major themes warrant a space in the analysis. Before the coding began, transcription of the interview was conducted with the help of free software called Otter AI and TurboScribe.

Thematic analysis of Teacher Ron's narrative data from the casual interview involved a careful, iterative reading of transcripts to identify recurring meanings embedded in his descriptions of teaching, his views and beliefs of teaching, and his everyday classroom interactions. We first conducted close readings of the interview responses, marking phrases that captured concrete moments such as Teacher Ron describing students arriving late or being absent in class after a strong typhoon, or his use of authentic day-to-day public conversations or field interviews as valuable conversations to explain public communication and journalism concepts. For instance, from Teacher Ron's narrative accounts, initial codes such as weather-induced disruption, precarity of attendance, students' socioeconomic scarcity, place-based pedagogy, everyday communicative practices, and contextualised meaning-making emerged, reflecting how teaching is continuously shaped by environmental contingencies and the integration of lived experiences into disciplinary learning.

One recurring pattern emerged from the interview narratives: students' prolonged absence after severe weather disruptions. In the interview, Teacher Ron explained that after a strong typhoon, several students from poorer coastal households or mountainous areas of the island were absent for weeks because their families needed them to help repair damaged homes, rebuild fishing boats, or recover crops and vegetation destroyed by flooding. This observation was coded as post-disaster absence and family livelihood responsibility, which were later grouped under the broader theme "Teaching within the Vulnerabilities of Island Life". A sub-theme, "Livelihood and Labour Before Schooling", became particularly visible when Teacher Ron recounted how one student returned to class nearly two weeks after a typhoon and quietly explained that he had been helping his father repair nets and salvage materials from their damaged house, although he was developing an awareness that some students were somehow "sensationalising" the struggles after a natural calamity to explain their absence. However, these absences were not simply matters of disengagement but were deeply tied to the socioeconomic fragility of island households, illustrating how natural calamities that are detrimental to human life and livelihood reshape educational participation and classroom engagement.

Teaching Artefacts

Part of Teacher Ron's weekly activities is to carefully assemble a body of teaching artefacts that have so much bearing on his sense of place as well as his pedagogical aims. Teacher Ron's syllabus functions as a highly structured yet contextually responsive pedagogical blueprint that foregrounds both disciplinary rigour and situated learning. The course explicitly aligns institutional, program, and course outcomes with broader civic and ethical

objectives, requiring students to "critically analyse school, local, and global social issues" and to produce journalistic outputs that meet "global standards of excellence" while remaining anchored in community realities, e.g., Biliran not having a legitimate media agency, such that the people rely on Facebook (e.g., Facebook pages about Biliran) with dubious and suspicious identification and intent. This dual emphasis reveals that the artefact is not merely a content guide but a curricular articulation of epistemic and epistemological priorities, namely: the cultivation of critical literacy, ethical reasoning, and socially conscious or civic-driven communication. The weekly breakdown of intended learning outcomes, teaching strategies, and assessment tasks demonstrates a deliberate scaffolding of competencies, moving from foundational knowledge (e.g., journalism history, RA 7079, communication ethics) to applied knowledge production (e.g., news writing or feature articles about the way of life of the people of Biliran, about heritage sites, about public communication strategies, or about eco-tourism businesses and local industries). Importantly, the integration of AI ethics, local journalism cases, and local contexts (e.g., analysis of campus issues, field observations, and interviews with people of Biliran) signals a pedagogical commitment to bridging global discourses with local idiosyncrasies and realities. As such, the syllabus becomes a key artefact for addressing the study's research questions, particularly in illuminating how teacher cognition and expertise translate into curricular design that mediates between institutional mandates and the socio-cultural demands of teaching on an island.

Complementing the syllabus, Teacher Ron's lesson structures operationalise these curricular intentions through highly interactive, practice-oriented, and multimodal learning experiences. The artefacts reveal a consistent pattern of experiential pedagogy in that students engage in mock editorial board meetings, guided debates, storyboarding workshops, and field visits and interviews, all of which simulate authentic journalistic practices. Assessment is likewise embedded within these activities, with outputs such as draft and final articles, peer critiques, and oral presentations reflecting a performance-based orientation rather than reliance on traditional written examinations alone. Notably, the lesson design accommodates hybrid modalities (onsite and online/offline tasks), including LMS-based drafting and reflective blogging using internet technology, which suggests an adaptive response to institutional and technological constraints. This is further reinforced by the inclusion of self-assessment checklists, iterative writing processes, and reflective journaling, emphasising self-reflexivity and learner autonomy. In relation to the study's aims, these teaching artefacts provide critical insight into how pedagogical practices are enacted under conditions of constraint and transition, revealing the teacher's negotiation between prescribed curriculum structures and the lived realities of students and of himself. Consequently, the lesson artefacts are not only instructional tools but also empirical evidence of how teaching is dynamically shaped by context, thereby directly informing the investigation of teacher agency, pedagogical adaptation, and the material conditions of classroom practice.

Document Analysis

Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing and interpreting documents to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge about a research

problem (Bowen, 2009). In qualitative research, documents such as journals, reports, artefacts, and written records are carefully examined and coded so that patterns and themes can be identified alongside other sources of data. Document analysis was used to examine Teacher Ron's syllabus and lesson plans as records of his pedagogical life on the island, complementing the thematic analysis by grounding interpretation in concrete written or material evidence. Document analysis treated these artefacts not merely as instructional guides but as texts that encode pedagogical intentions, institutional expectations, contextual adaptations, and self-reflections. Through close reading, attention was given to the organisation of course outcomes, learning activities, assessment structures, and modality choices (e.g., onsite, online, offline), in order to identify recurring patterns, emphasis, critical points and tensions within the documents. The analysis focused on how these artefacts signify broader meanings about teaching in an island context, particularly how global standards, disciplinary norms, and local realities are negotiated within curricular design and students' needs and grounded realities. By examining both explicit elements (such as stated objectives and tasks) and implicit dimensions (such as assumptions about learners, access, and resources), document analysis enabled a deeper understanding of how pedagogy is structured, mediated, interpreted and enacted under conditions of constraint, thereby directly informing the study's inquiry into power, practice, marginality, and meaning in island teaching.

For instance, our document analysis of Teacher Ron's syllabus and lesson plans revealed how marginality is not simply a physical backdrop that allows us to juxtapose with mainland regions of the Philippines, but is something inscribed within the very structure of pedagogical design. The coexistence of global curricular demands and locally adapted practices, such as hybrid modalities, field-based tasks, and flexible assessment, signals how teaching is continually negotiated within conditions of resource constraint, geographic distance or isolation, and the institutional pressure to meet the standards of the mainstream education system in the country. In this sense, marginality emerges as both a limiting condition and a productive space, shaping how teaching is imagined, organised, and enacted on the island that deeply foregrounds the lived realities of both teachers and students.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study by examining how Teacher Ron's lived experiences illuminate the complex interplay between institutional power, local practices, and the realities of teaching in a remote island context. Through a phenomenological and semiotic lens, the analysis reveals how pedagogical practices, constraints, and everyday encounters function as sites where meaning, identity, becoming, authority, and peripherality are continuously embodied, negotiated and contested. The discussion further interprets these findings through critical and postcolonial perspectives, highlighting how teaching at the margins becomes both a constrained and transformative practice.

Marginality Is Adaptability, Initiative and Resourcefulness in Response to Scarcity

Marginality in Teacher Ron's narratives is not reducible to physical remoteness or geographical isolation; rather, it emerges as a relational condition produced through

unequal proximity to institutional power, recognition, and resources. Mallach (2024) argues that peripherality must be understood not as a static geographic fact but as a condition constituted through a person's and a place's relationship to the centre, a relationship marked by uneven investment, and the discursive construction of the periphery perceived as backward, deficient, or lacking. This seems to illuminate Teacher Ron's account of teaching in an island setting, where the institution is simultaneously a source of dignity and a site of structural strain: he experiences his managerial appointment as a privilege, yet that privilege is immediately burdened by academic and administrative overload, administrative spillover, and the expectation that he compensates for resource scarcity through personal adaptability and adjustment. "It's a privilege to teach and at the same time be a part of the administration… in the sense that the administration has trust and confidence in me," Teacher Ron expressed. Yet, this recognition is immediately entangled with the burden of excess responsibilities, where he was "given other assignments… not only teaching," which he describes as "overwhelming", but that he "needs to adapt" because "it is what it is" in his context, and this seems to be the case in many other educational contexts in the Philippines. In this sense, marginality is represented through a condensed responsibility, such that the teacher becomes the mechanism through which the institution manages its own peripheral condition (e.g., the lack of faculty as a human resource; therefore, a faculty member is straddling between several roles and responsibilities), aligning with broader discussions of marginality as structured through unequal access to resources, and limited autonomy and institutional voice (Crossley, 2014; Varghese et al., 2005). The teacher becomes the site at which institutional scarcity is absorbed, negotiated, and rendered functional. The very trust that affirms Teacher Ron's institutional belonging thus becomes the mechanism through which an added labour is assigned, revealing how marginal institutions often rely on the elasticity or flexibility of individual actors to sustain themselves, for the institution.

This is precisely where the insights of Danson and de Souza (2012) become especially useful. Their framing of periphery and marginality emphasises that such peripheral regions are often subordinated not only economically but also epistemically and politically, particularly within policy and research agendas that privilege cities or city-regions over peripheral communities. Teacher Ron's narrative exemplifies this layered marginality. His teaching is shaped by a student population with highly diverse disciplinary and learning needs, by the lack of strong pedagogical scaffolding, and by the requirement that he constantly recalibrates his methods across different programs and contexts. "It was difficult at first… juggling between preparing my lesson materials and teaching different subjects with diverse student groups while acting in the role of a member of the school management team, but I was able to adjust to this reality". What this reveals is that marginality is lived as a form of ongoing pedagogical improvisation: the teacher must supply, through reflexivity, cognitive agility, and emotional labour, what the institutional structure cannot fully guarantee. His repeated insistence that he must first "learn" and "understand" his students and their backgrounds before he can teach them suggests an ethically serious aspect of pedagogy, but it also discloses how teachers in peripheral institutions are compelled to absorb systemic instability into their own bodies, minds, and practices. "You need to live with it, and to follow the mandate from the top", said Teacher Ron, "even if, at times, it's really hard, but you need to adapt and to fill the gap". Indeed, as teachers in peripheral

contexts actively negotiate and reconstruct professional identity within constrained environments, they are placed in a position to receive other institutional or administrative roles (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Day & Kington, 2008) because to them, it is the right thing to do, although at times, this puts teaching at risk.

Teacher Ron's reflections on media education through his teaching of campus journalism make this marginal condition even more visible at the level of symbolic and epistemic dimensions. Mallach (2024) notes that peripheralization is closely tied to social and political inequalities and to the way a place can be rendered less meaningful within dominant societal discourse. That claim resonates with Teacher Ron's description of an island context in which legitimate and established media institutions are weak or absent, leaving his students to be more deeply oriented toward informal and often unverifiable social media sources, the most popular of which is Facebook. The problem here is not merely technological preference; it is that the island's informational environment bears the marks and realities of marginality itself. Teacher Ron's pedagogical strategy, i.e., asking students to compare Facebook pages with "legitimate" or "established" media, with the intent of foregrounding ethics, and repeatedly teaching media literacy, functions as a form of semiotic repair. He attempted to reconstruct distinctions between truth and fabrication in a setting where the signs of institutional legitimacy are fragile and, at times, dubious. "They [his students] cannot be consuming fake news on Facebook, in which plenty of pages created about this island are suspicious. They must be able to discern by using their critical minds to question and interrogate issues and situations locally and nationally", said Teacher Ron. Marginality, then, is epistemological: it shapes what knowledge looks like, how authority is recognised, and what kinds of truths become possible in the first place. "This absence of fundamental and legitimate media institutions on the island somehow shapes how students view Facebook as a trusted platform for news, even if fake news abounds on this platform… and this is scary because when fake news persists on these social media platforms, such fake news can become the reality to many, such fake news becomes their basis for truth, and this is alarming", Teacher Ron argued.

Finally, Teacher Ron's narrative shows that marginality is also affective and temporal. It is affective in the sense that teaching on the island allows him to enjoy the fresh air and fresh food from the farms and the oceans, the beautiful scenery of Biliran mountains, hills, and the seas, and how time can slow down the pace of life, which, to him, is beneficial to mental and physical health. "Geographically speaking, I got the privilege to enjoy the scenery here, and the laidback environment here. I mean, far from pollution, we have the seas, trees, thick forests and mountains, and fresh air, so it's a bonus, you know… working here and teaching on a remote island of the country. To me, it's a blessing to be with nature." This line clearly captures how he frames the island's natural environment, offering him an aesthetic, biophilic, and affective value within his lived experience. "It is also our pride that tourists from different parts of the world are now visiting the island. They speak so highly of our local scenery, mountains, falls, and beaches here", he added with pride.

In terms of temporality, Teacher Ron describes his daily life as routine, from school to home, and from home to school, with moments of excitement occurring mainly when outsiders visit their campus, as though recognition must arrive from elsewhere (or from external visitors) before the ordinary can feel significant. This echoes Mallach's (2024)

broader argument that peripheral places are often stigmatised through their seeming isolation or distance, while Danson and de Souza (2012) remind us that peripheries are too often positioned at the edge of both development discourse and institutional attention.

In Teacher Ron's account, this produces a subtle but powerful phenomenology of the margins: life slows down, but routine becomes flattened, weather disruptions become magnified, and the work of teaching unfolds under conditions where educational continuity is vulnerable to both environmental precarity and collective habits shaped by island realities. For one, a collective habit would emerge among both faculty and students to turn their attention to protecting livelihoods, such as gathering and stocking food and drinking water as storms approach, reflecting a shared anticipation and adaptation in which survival routines temporarily take precedence over academic life. Another habit foregrounds recognition, which is felt as more meaningful when it arrives from external institutions or visitors, revealing how validation in marginal spaces is often oriented outward rather than generated from within. "If there are university events, or other people such as guests from other regions or countries visiting the university, you feel like, oh, other universities got to visit us… Why us? So, on your part, it's something new to you. And you feel proud and happy about it." This captures how recognition becomes most meaningful when it is conferred externally, rather than emerging from everyday internal validation. This orientation toward the "foreign" often stems from living at the margins of dominant economic, social and cultural flows, where external goods, knowledge or ideas, and visitors come to signify prestige, opportunity, and connection to a wider world that feels otherwise distant. Echoing how islandness is co-constructed through relational, temporal, material, and discursive conditions rather than fixed isolation (Grydehøj & Casagrande, 2020; Nimführ, 2020), what emerges from Teacher Ron's testimony seems to illustrate marginality as a multi-layered lived reality—spatial, institutional, epistemic, temporal and emotional—within which the island teacher must continually create coherence, meaning, and pedagogical focus from within structures that remain only partially enabling, because it is viewed as peripheral.

Teaching Artefacts as Signs of Care and Commitment to Community and Civic Society

The teaching artefacts shared by Teacher Ron (one course guide and two lesson plans) construct a pedagogy in which teaching on the island is not merely the delivery of content but the orchestration of signs that connect institutional aspiration, civic responsibility, media literacy, and discernment, consistent with scholarship demonstrating that pedagogical artefacts are themselves sign systems encoding institutional authority and assumptions about legitimate knowledge (Barthes, 1972; Chandler, 2017; Kress, 2010). The campus journalism syllabus functions as a formal pedagogical sign system: its tables, learning outcomes, week-by-week sequencing of lessons, required concepts and readings, assessment tasks, assessment rubrics and institutional branding signify order, legitimacy, and accountability. As a sign, the syllabus presents teaching as structured, standards-based, and ethically regulated; its object is the formation of pre-service teachers who can write, edit, publish, and act responsibly in public discourse; and its interpretant is the understanding that good teaching in this context means aligning classroom work with institutional goals, community realities, civic-mindedness, and professional conduct, e.g., how to be an effective

adviser of a campus paper of a remote school on the island where children are less exposed to critical thinking and journalistic writing. This is especially visible in the way the syllabus links "local/global communities," "civic responsibility," "historical consciousness," and "the common good" to campus journalism outcomes, suggesting that language and media instruction on the island is imagined not as isolated skill-building but as socially oriented work.

A semiotic reading also shows that the artefact encodes power through bureaucratic and institutional symbols. The repeated placement of the school's vision, mission, policies, core values, approval signatures, official address, and logos does more than provide information; it also serves as a sign of educational authority and state-recognised legitimacy. Their object is institutional power itself, i.e., what counts as established knowledge, proper procedures, and acceptable teaching practices, and the likely interpretant for students is that learning is inseparable from compliance with the status quo, the wider academic, administrative, and national frameworks. In a remote island context, this matters because such signs can be read as compensatory: they anchor local teaching with unique needs to address, to broader systems of recognition and excellence, perhaps countering any assumption that island schooling is peripheral, lesser, or deficient, a representational tendency that island studies scholars have persistently critiqued (Baldacchino, 2007; Connell, 2013). At the same time, the syllabus does not present power as purely top-down. Its insistence on "community issues," "field immersion," "mock editorial board meetings," "campus or national education issue[s]," and the final publication of a campus paper suggests that pedagogical authority is also redistributed through participation, student voice, and public meaning-making. In that sense, the artefact reveals an underlying belief that island teaching must negotiate both institutional discipline and civic-mindedness. "So, basically, the activities that I want my students to undertake practically respond to what's really needed, what the society needs, by highlighting what the problems are, and that, of course, is the role of education to somehow give intervention on these social problems through journalism," shared Teacher Ron.

The syllabus further reveals a pragmatic, adaptive pedagogy shaped by material and geographic realities. Repeated references to onsite and online/offline modes, handwritten submission "if offline," field observation or field immersion, topic scouting within school or outside in the community, and print or online publication are all signs of a teaching practice calibrated to variable access, mobility, and infrastructure. Here, the signs are hybrid delivery modes and flexible formats; the object is continuity of learning under conditions that may not always be technologically seamless; and the interpretant is that effective island teaching depends on resilience, improvisation, initiative, and multimodal resourcefulness, resonating with research that documents how geographically fragmented and infrastructurally vulnerable island settings directly shape the conditions of teaching and learning (Akmad & Abatayo, 2024; Pinca, 2015). This suggests a core assumption of remote pedagogy: the teacher cannot rely on one stable channel of instruction, so pedagogy must remain transferable and adaptable across classroom, community, paper-based, and digital spaces. Teacher Ron, an island teacher, therefore, appears as someone who teaches at the intersection of scarcity and possibility, converting logistical limitations into a practical pedagogical design rather than treating them as mere obstacles. "That's why, sometimes, it's

a challenge for us to navigate the one-hour offline-online class… how can you, you know, squeeze your lessons for just 2-hour on-site classes, and then one hour online… But we adapt. We adjust. Sometimes, too, with weather disruptions, we really need to adapt, to be agile, and to understand that students can submit assessment tasks late because of constraints pertaining to technology, the weather, and emotional issues."

The PPT slides on media literacy complement this by translating abstract theory into vivid visual pedagogy. Slides with questions such as "Is media still relevant this time?", the "Traditional Media vs New Media" image, the "Information is Power" poster, and the word cloud centred on "media and information literacy" operate as highly accessible signs meant to arrest attention and frame learning as urgent, consequential, and important. In semiotic terms, these images are the signs; their objects are the contemporary information environment, the struggle over truth, and the social consequences of media use; and their interpretants are likely feelings of alertness, relevance, and personal and broader implications. The slide deck suggests that the island teacher values pedagogy that is not only informative but visually persuasive, such that teaching must compete with, and therefore resemble, the media ecologies students already inhabit. This implies an important underlying belief: that in a remote island setting, where formal schooling may compete with powerful informal digital influences, teaching must itself become semiotically strong, memorable, and publicly meaningful and transformative, an insight aligned with how island pedagogy functions as semiotic translation between global signs of academic authority and locally grounded meaning (Hall, 1997; Kress, 2010). As Teacher Ron shared, "At least they [my students] have a little bit of discernment… distinguishing what's really fake news and inauthentic information… some are literate enough in assessing what's really authentic information that they have to share, that they have to process, and then what's not to share… but there are students who don't seem to scrutinise information. It's scary and shameful when they share fake news on social media if they are actually aspiring educators, so I keep warning them. They must be in the know".

The slides also make power visible by teaching students to read media as constructed, contested, and ideological. The five core concepts illustrated in the slide deck, such as media messages are constructed, use of a unique language, information is interpreted differently, media embeds values and points of view, and media are often driven by profitable motives, are themselves pedagogical signs of suspicion and inquiry. Their object is the hidden architecture of media and power constitutive of authorship, technique, selective representation, manipulation, ideology, and economic motive. The intended interpretant is that students should no longer consume messages innocently but interrogate who created them, for whom, and to what end. This becomes especially significant when the slide deck moves to "issues in media literacy" such as misinformation, scams, racism, violence, cyberbullying, and dehumanising terminology, and when it offers practical prompts like "Press pause," "Check the source," "Think before you click", and "Can you verify?", these signs reveal a pedagogy grounded in vigilance and accountability. Teacher Ron is not simply imparting learning competencies in his campus journalism class; he is provoking learners into pursuing suspicion, critical thinking, and responsible sharing of knowledge, enacting what critical scholars have long identified as the teacher's fundamental

role in cultivating learners' capacity to interrogate dominant discourses (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1988).

What is especially striking across both artefacts is how they position students as future mediators between local reality and broader publics. In the syllabus, students interview administrators, student leaders, and faculty advisers, write about campus and community issues, simulate editorial boards, produce photo essays, and publish a campus paper. In the slide deck, students are trained to question representation, bias, stereotype, omission, and emotional and psychological manipulation. As signs, these activities and questions point to journalism and media literacy as civic practices rather than merely academic exercises; their object is the preparation of learners who can speak with and for their communities; and the interpretant is that education in this island context is expected to produce not just graduates, but interpreters and critics of social and political life. This reveals a strong underlying value: teaching in a remote setting carries a representative burden. The classroom is not detached from community life; it is one of the places where the island learns to narrate itself, defend itself from distortion, and enter wider conversations. This is a relational and civic pedagogical orientation that scholars of care ethics and critical pedagogy have consistently championed (Noddings, 2013; Giroux, 2014).

At a deeper level, these pedagogical signs suggest that Teacher Ron's practice is illustrated by a belief in education as an instrument of ethical formation. The syllabus repeatedly foregrounds ethics—journalism ethics, AI ethics, ethics in sports reporting, ethics in photo manipulation, and a classroom policy centred on dignity, human rights, and zero tolerance for harassment. The slide deck similarly warns against harmful content, misinformation, disinformation, malicious intent, hate, and dehumanisation, and concludes with the principle that media education is not about "having the right answers" but "asking the right questions." In semiotic terms, ethics here is not an optional add-on; it is the object to which many signs point, whether rubrics, reflections, captions, debates, or checklists. The likely interpretant for students is that knowledge becomes meaningful only when exercised with care, restraint, and responsibility toward others. This reveals an assumption that may be especially salient in a remote island context, that is, because social worlds are often tightly interconnected, communication has immediate ethical consequences, and teaching must therefore cultivate judgment as much as skill, values deeply resonant with Filipino cultural frameworks of *serbisyo* (service), *malasakit* (compassion), and *tiyaga* (perseverance) embedded in island teaching practice (Enriquez, 1992; Mercado, 1974).

Nevertheless, on the aspect of how students view success concerning how education should shape them, or how they view education in reflection to how they view their lives and their future in retrospect to the academic journey they are treading, a unique but illuminating sign emerged: to go with the flow by living a simple life on the island. "This response came from them [his students] without hesitation or ornament… I was surprised, so I had to pause to really understand what they meant. Yet I realised how profound their response was… To live simply and be content, to speak clearly and with intent and desire to the people in the community, to use basic mathematics to count numbers well enough to sustain a small business, and to earn just enough to stand on their own feet", Teacher Ron narrated his students' honest responses shaped by a sense of place and the necessities of island life. "We don't need a lot. As long as we can sustain our local business, have food on

our tables, and can send our children to school, what is there to ask for more?" one of Teacher Ron's students declared. Success here is not imagined as ascent, but as steadiness, not accumulation, but sufficiency, not abundance in material wealth but being able to say "this is enough", echoing island scholarship that challenges deficit imaginaries by foregrounding place-based identity and the coherence of lives lived meaningfully at the margins (Hau'ofa, 1994; Foley, 2023). And listening to them, one begins to wonder what more success could possibly demand beyond a simple life that works, endures, and remains deeply meaningful and balanced.

Overall, the teaching artefacts reveal that the pedagogical signs, symbols, and practices of Teacher Ron as an island teacher signify a coherent philosophy of teaching: structured but adaptive, institutional yet community-oriented, visually engaging yet critically demanding, and deeply concerned with ethics, voice, and public discourse, as well as resonant of the aspirations of his students. The signs of official templates, modular scheduling, local immersion, print/digital hybridity, critical questioning, and anti-misinformation advocacy all point to an underlying belief that remote education must do more than just transmit curriculum; it must equip learners to navigate unequal flows of information and representation while remaining rooted in local realities, as scholars of peripheral education and locally bounded knowledge production have consistently argued (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Crossley, 2014). In that sense, these artefacts show that teaching at the margins is not marginal in intellectual ambition. Rather, it is a practice of meaning-making under constraint, where the island teacher uses pedagogical signs to assert, through a form of semiotic translation in which global symbols of academic authority intersect with locally grounded meanings (Hall, 1997; Altbach & Knight, 2007), that students are not passive recipients of knowledge but active interpreters, discerning cultural workers, and conscientious participants in civic society. More importantly, the signs also point to how students glimpse a worldview in which meaning is not chased but lived, found in sufficiency, cultural rootedness, and the simple fulfilment of a balanced and a good life on the island.

Power, Community, and Identity Are Constantly Negotiated in an Island Context

The interview with Teacher Ron reveals a professional identity that is not simply shaped by institutional structures but produced through a continuous negotiation of power, knowledge, and lived realities. From a Foucauldian perspective, teaching on the island can be understood as an enactment of disciplinary power, where institutional expectations consisting of curricula, administrative roles, and the mandate to "deliver quality education" function as forces that shape what counts as legitimate knowledge and practice (Foucault, 1977, 1980). Yet Teacher Ron does not passively reproduce these structures. Instead, his identity emerges through adaptive practices that respond to diverse learners, limited resources, and shifting priorities. His lack of formal teacher training (as he disclosed during the interview) further complicates this, positioning his sense of becoming not as a linear professional trajectory but as a situated and experiential process in which authority is gradually constructed through reflection, improvisation, initiative, and responsiveness rather than simply inherited from institutional certification. This is a dynamic consistent with scholarship positioning professional identity as relational, contested, and continuously

negotiated within power-laden educational contexts (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Day & Kington, 2008; Sachs, 2005).

At the same time, institutional power is experienced as both enabling and constraining. Teacher Ron's description of teaching as a "privilege" reflects how institutions confer legitimacy, trust, and a sense of belonging, aligning with Shore and Wright's (2015) view of institutions as sites where policies are not merely implemented but lived and embodied. Being assigned multiple administrative roles beyond teaching signifies recognition and inclusion within institutional hierarchies, yet this same recognition produces overload, stress, and fragmentation, as administrative responsibilities encroach upon pedagogical time and obligations, reproducing what scholars identify as the codification of the "ideal academic" through managerial logics that narrow professional agency (Ball, 2012; Shore & Wright, 2015). Thus, his professional identity is shaped through what might be called policy entanglement, where institutional expectations are not external impositions but are internalised, negotiated, and sometimes resisted in everyday practice. Belonging, in this sense, is conditional and dynamic, produced through participation in institutional life while simultaneously strained by its demands.

Local practices and cultural contexts further reconfigure the operation of power, aligning with Giroux's (2014) conception of teachers as transformative intellectuals operating in institutions of power. Teacher Ron's emphasis on immersion, community engagement, and socially responsive tasks reflects a pedagogy that seeks to bridge institutional knowledge with realities grounded in island life and local culture. By requiring students to investigate community issues, document heritage sites, or engage with local business industries, he repositions teaching as a critical space and practice that foregrounds the lived experiences of the people on the island. This suggests that his authority as a teacher is not solely derived from institutional position but from his ability to mediate between official or institutional knowledge and knowledge derived from his own observations and the lived experiences of his students. In doing so, he enacts a form of critical pedagogy that challenges the boundaries of formal education, positioning students not merely as recipients of knowledge but as participants in the production of socially and politically relevant understanding, reflecting the long-standing argument that teachers are not passive recipients of institutional power but interpret, resist, and reconfigure it through everyday practice (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1988). "So, basically, the activities that I want my students to undertake must practically respond to what's really needed, what the society needs, by highlighting what the problems are… I immerse them in the field… they really have to go to local business establishments, to towns by the sea, by the river or in the mountains… and then assess the challenges being encountered by these establishments, towns or communities located in the island province… even to document heritage sites, as required in a research class I'm facilitating. For instance, one research group was able to document old Spanish houses in the town of Biliran that date back in time that perhaps the Department of Tourism in the province is not aware of. If they can tell the local tourism council about this, then this is what we mean by critical thinking, civic participation, and civic engagement, isn't it? Documenting heritage is a way of telling the public of our history, of colonisation, and how our ancestors had endured," Teacher Ron argued.

However, this mediation also reveals the limits and contestations of authority in a remote island context. The dominance of social media, e.g., Facebook, as a primary source of information among students disrupts traditional sources of knowledge, challenging the teacher's role as the primary authority. In Foucauldian terms, power is diffused and reproduced, no longer concentrated within the classroom but dispersed across digital networks and informal knowledge systems (Foucault, 1980). Teacher Ron's efforts to cultivate media literacy and critical discernment can thus be read as attempts to reassert pedagogical authority, not through control, but through fostering critical awareness through a discerning, questioning mind, operating within conditions where staffing, specialist knowledge, and professional development opportunities are thinner or scarcer than in mainstream institutions (Crossley, 2014; Varghese et al., 2005). This reflects a shift from authoritative teaching to what Giroux (2014) might describe as dialogic and critical engagement, where the teacher's role is to guide students in navigating competing discourses rather than dictating truth. In navigating Facebook as the most popular social media platform on the island, Teacher Ron still believes in some of his students who can distinguish fact from opinion. "At least some of them have that discernment… distinguishing what's really fake news and what's inauthentic information or misinformation, from what is factual information. And I believe this makes a difference."

Environmental and structural constraints further complicate how power is experienced and enacted. The frequent suspension of classes due to weather conditions, the influence of local government decisions on class suspensions, and the reliance on flexible learning modalities illustrate how authority is distributed across multiple actors and forces, mirroring how geographically fragmented and infrastructurally vulnerable island settings directly shape the conditions of teaching (Akmad & Abatayo, 2024; Pinca, 2015). As Shore and Wright (2015) argue, policy and governance are lived through everyday practices, and in this case, decisions about class suspensions, safety, and learning continuity despite weather disruptions reveal how power operates through negotiation rather than unilateral control. Teacher Ron's frustration with the normalisation of disruptions reflects an awareness of how such practices can undermine educational rigour, yet he also acknowledges the necessity of adhering to these decisions. "I could be wrong, but sometimes, class suspensions due to weather disruptions are somehow being romanticised… I feel that students are making use of this as an excuse not to go to school, and this is becoming a habit disrupting the curriculum… and many of them go to social media to post, comment and share, pressuring the local government to adhere to their call." His critical view of how students instrumentalise weather conditions to push for class suspensions, while maintaining his professional identity, is thus shaped by a constant balancing act between compliance with institutional and governmental authority, the severity of weather disruptions, and a commitment to sustaining meaningful learning, a balancing act characteristic of island educators who develop professional identity through place-based practice (Dick & Burns, 2022). "But I am aware of how storms on the island can be strong and dangerous. They really disrupt livelihoods, transport, mobility, and internet connectivity", Teacher Ron added.

From the perspective of critical pedagogy, Teacher Ron's practice reflects an emerging orientation toward teaching as a site of social critique and transformation rather

than mere knowledge transmission. His emphasis on immersion, community engagement, and problem-based tasks aligns with the idea that education should be grounded in the learners' lived realities and grounded experiences and directed toward addressing inequities within those contexts. By asking students to investigate local issues, interrogate media practices, and engage with community stakeholders, he positions the classroom as a space where knowledge is co-constructed and socially consequential. This resonates with Giroux's (2014) notion of the teacher as a transformative intellectual who not only imparts skills but also cultivates critical consciousness. However, this critical orientation is not without tension. Teacher Ron must still operate within institutional constraints that prioritise outcomes, compliance, and standardisation, shaped by curriculum frameworks, accreditation mechanisms, and audit cultures (Ball, 2012), which can limit the extent to which critical pedagogy can be fully realised. For instance, the old yet pervasive English-only policy, even in remote islands of the Philippines, somehow stunts student voice and narrows their expression by forcing thought into a linguistic frame that many do not fully speak and inhabit, reproducing what postcolonial scholars identify as a colonial language hierarchy in which English as the medium of instruction carries forms of power originating from colonial history (Phillipson, 1992), preventing nuance, emotion, and cultural specificity from coming to the fore in dialogue. As a result, ideas are not only constrained in clarity and depth, but critical dialogue itself is weakened, as speakers struggle to articulate what they truly mean rather than what they can merely translate. "So, even if this policy permeates our current teaching practices, I don't stop my students from code-switching if this enables them to convey their ideas, sentiments and emotions more accurately and clearly. They need to think and speak in the language that they can fully express themselves if what we are rooting for them is authenticity, sincerity, criticality, and truth", Teacher Ron declared. Thus, his practice reflects a negotiated criticality, one that works within institutional boundaries while subtly expanding them, enabling students to question dominant narratives without entirely escaping the structures that produce those narratives, and by embodying the freedom to speak in the language they are most comfortable with.

Viewed through a postcolonial lens, Teacher Ron's experience also reveals how teaching on the island is shaped by historical and geopolitical marginality. The characterisation of the university as "in the periphery" or "at the edge of the margins" signals not only geographic isolation but also its position within broader hierarchies of knowledge production, where metropolitan or mainstream institutions are often privileged over those in remote regions. In this context, the teacher's work can be read as a form of epistemic mediation, navigating between dominant, often externally derived curricula and the local knowledge, culture, and practices of the island, navigating what postcolonial theorists describe as the conditions of precarity and vulnerability at the margins of knowledge production (Spivak, 1988; de Certeau, 1984). Teacher Ron's efforts to foreground local heritage, community practices, and provincial realities challenge the implicit hierarchy that places "central" knowledge above "peripheral" knowledge, thereby resisting what postcolonial theorists might identify as epistemic marginalisation or silencing, a resistance that is politically charged given how islands are routinely constructed within dominant discourses as "small," "limited," "deficient", or "isolated" (Baldacchino, 2007; Connell, 2013; Foley, 2023; Nimführ, 2020). At the same time, the continued reliance on institutional

standards, formal curricula, and notions of "legitimate" knowledge suggests that these hierarchies are not easily dismantled but are instead negotiated in everyday practice. Teaching, therefore, becomes a site of both reproduction and resistance, where the island teacher inhabits a liminal space, simultaneously shaped by dominant structures of power and actively working to re-centre local voices, experiences, and ways of knowing, in what island scholars describe as a reframing of peripheral identity through relational and place-based practice (Hau'ofa, 1994; Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). "The localness and uniqueness of our islands, our eco-tourism sites, the food systems we produce, our livelihood, our sustainable development in a rural island context, and our cultural identity, these are all sources and systems of knowledge that enable us to reclaim local voices, experiences, and ways of knowing, and allow us to really highlight local perspectives, lived realities, and knowledge systems that should not be perceived as peripheral or marginalised", Teacher Ron strongly argued, illustrating a conviction resonant with scholarship insisting that islandness is not a fixed deficit but a co-constituted identity produced through networks, flows, and resilient local knowledge (Grydehøj & Casagrande, 2020; Crossley, 2014; Nimführ, 2020),

Teacher Ron's experience illustrates that teaching on a remote island is a process of becoming that is deeply entangled with power yet not reducible to it. His sense of self, belonging, and professional identity is forged through the interplay of institutional authority, local culture, and material and environmental constraints, resulting in a pedagogy that is both disciplined and transformative. Drawing on Foucault (1977, 1980), we see how power produces the conditions of teaching, while Giroux (2014) highlights the potential for teachers to act critically within those conditions, and Shore and Wright (2015) remind us that institutional policies are lived, negotiated, contested, reinterpreted, and embodied in practice. In this light, Teacher Ron emerges not as a passive agent of institutional power but as a situated practitioner who navigates, reshapes, and at times resists the forces that define his professional world, illuminating how islandness is produced through everyday educational relations that raise vital questions about who defines quality, whose knowledge counts, and how teachers convert structural constraints into situated forms of autonomy, agency, and resilience (Crossley, 2014; Nimführ, 2020; Dick & Burns, 2024).

Theoretical Implications

From a phenomenological perspective, this study suggests that island teaching should be understood not as an abstract professional category but as an embodied, situated, and affective experience shaped by routine, adjustment, recognition, and negotiation. Teacher Ron's narrative shows that professional identity is constituted through everyday encounters with students, administrative demands, weather disruptions, community realities, and institutional expectations, rather than through formal definitions of roles and responsibilities alone. The implication for phenomenology is that the meaning of teaching in a remote island context emerges through how the teacher lives and interprets his world: in Teacher Ron's case, teaching is experienced as privilege, burden, obligation, adaptation, and becoming all at once. This extends lived-experience scholarship by showing that teacher identity in marginal or peripheral settings is not merely personal but existentially shaped by

geography, precarity, and the constant need to make sense of competing demands, needs, and interests that permeate everyday practice.

From a semiotic perspective, the study implies that island teaching is saturated with signs that mediate power, belonging, and meaning. Institutional roles, class suspensions, media platforms, heritage sites, local industries, community immersion, and even the absence of "legitimate" media in the province all function as signs through which the teacher interprets the island, his place, and his rootedness within it. Teacher Ron's teaching practice demonstrates that pedagogy itself becomes semiotic work: students are taught to read not only texts, but the meanings embedded in local realities, community issues, misinformation, cultural assets, and institutional expectations. Theoretically, this means that semiotics in island teaching cannot be confined to symbols inside the classroom; it must include the broader ecology of signs through which teachers and students make sense of marginality, legitimacy, and local life and culture. Island teaching, therefore, expands semiotic inquiry by foregrounding how geographically remote educational contexts produce distinctive sign systems in which local culture, scarcity, and institutional authority are constantly entangled, interpreted and reconfigured.

From the standpoint of critical pedagogy and postcolonial education, the study suggests that island teaching is a deeply political practice because it involves negotiating which knowledges matter, whose realities are represented, and how education responds to life at the margins. Teacher Ron's emphasis on field immersion in different places on the island, local heritage, social media discernment, and community-responsive programs reflects a critical pedagogical orientation in which students are positioned as interrogators and interpreters of social reality rather than passive recipients of knowledge. At the same time, the island context reveals a postcolonial tension: the teacher works within institutional and curricular structures shaped by dominant, centralised notions of legitimacy, while also attempting to foreground local histories, local needs, local habits and rituals, and ways of knowing unique to the island settlers. The theoretical implication is that critical pedagogy in peripheral settings must also be postcolonial, such that it must not only question inequality, marginalisation, and power dynamics in general but also confront epistemic hierarchies that render island communities secondary to metropolitan centres, or mainstream, established sources of knowledge. Confronting epistemic hierarchies and injustices is a way of further examining how the historical legacy of colonialism continues to shape and reshape cultures, identities, knowledge, and power relations in formerly colonised societies so that students of the contemporary era can start thinking, interrogating and questioning the legitimacy of such identities, knowledges, and power relations being constantly recreated. In this sense, the study contributes to theory by showing that teaching on the island is both a critical and a decolonising act: it challenges formal educational boundaries while re-positioning and re-centring the lived realities, voices, and knowledge systems of the local community.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study suggest that teaching in remote island contexts must move beyond standardised, content-driven instruction toward a context-responsive and relational model of teaching. Teacher Ron's practice demonstrates that meaningful learning emerges when pedagogy is anchored in the lived realities of students through community

immersion, engagement with local industries, and critical examination of social and political issues in the island province. This implies that teachers working in similar contexts should design learning experiences that are not only cognitively demanding but also socially situated, rooted in local cultures and systems of knowing, allowing students to interrogate their environments and participate in knowledge production, e.g., research studies focused on heritage sites, local eco-tourism projects, and local livelihoods that are waning but are courageously sustained. At the same time, pedagogy must remain flexible and adaptive, capable of responding to infrastructural limitations, shifting modalities of teaching, and environmental disruptions such as weather-related class suspensions due to typhoons. Thus, effective teaching in such contexts requires a pedagogical stance that balances structure with improvisation and initiative, where curriculum is not rigidly delivered but dynamically reconfigured in response to local conditions, student diversity and needs, and emergent challenges.

Furthermore, the study highlights the need for pedagogy that explicitly cultivates critical literacy, ethical discernment, and student agency, particularly in relation to the pervasive influence of social media and informal, at times, suspicious knowledge systems, such as the increased reliance on Facebook for information. Teacher Ron's emphasis on helping students distinguish between authentic or factual information and misleading information points to the importance of integrating media literacy and critical inquiry across disciplines, not as supplementary skills but as core learning outcomes for students to learn how to distinguish facts from opinions, and truths from falsity. Pedagogically, this requires shifting from transmission-oriented teaching toward dialogic and reflective practices where students are encouraged to question sources, evaluate evidence, and consider the broader implications of information in their communities. In addition, the findings call for teacher education programs to better prepare educators for the realities of teaching in marginal or peripheral contexts, equipping them with the skills to navigate institutional demands while remaining responsive to local cultures and constraints. Therefore, teaching on the island must be both critically grounded and ethically oriented, aimed not only at academic achievement but at fostering learners who are capable of engaging thoughtfully and responsibly with the complex social worlds they inhabit by beginning to explore their own locality in an island setting.

Limitations

This study acknowledges several methodological limitations that shape the scope and depth of its findings. Most notably, the absence of direct classroom observations constrained our ability to examine more deeply how Teacher Ron's pedagogical intentions are enacted in real-time interactions with his students, including the nuances of teacher–student dynamics, embodied practices, moments of silence during classroom teaching, and spontaneous decision-making in response to contextual or conditional disruptions, incidents, and challenges in the classroom. In addition, the study relied on a casual interview and document analysis without attempting to access Teacher Ron's reflective logs, diaries or journals, which could have provided richer qualitative data and illuminating insight into his evolving beliefs, principles, dilemmas, emotions, and logic revolving around teaching on an island. As a result, the analysis captures a mediated representation of teaching practice

rather than a fully triangulated account, and future research incorporating real-life classroom observation, home visits and conversations in the teacher's home or residence, and capturing real-life, authentic reflective documentations such as journal logs or diaries, even pictures and videos about their personal lives, would offer a deeper, more substantial, more nuanced, and more comprehensive understanding of teaching in island contexts.

Conclusion

Teacher Ron's narrative reveals that teaching on the island is not merely a professional role but a process of identity forming and becoming shaped through the constant negotiation of institutional power, local realities, and material and environmental constraints. In this space, pedagogy emerges as both a disciplined practice and a creative act, where limitations are not simply endured but reworked into possibilities for meaningful, context-responsive education. This study underscores that the island teacher's identity is forged at the intersection of authority and agency, where institutional expectations, community engagement, and everyday contingencies converge to produce a form of teaching that is simultaneously constrained and transformative, a kind of teaching that repositions the classroom as a critical site for mediating knowledge, interrogating social realities, and cultivating ethical and reflective learners. In illuminating the lived experience of Teacher Ron, this study suggests that teaching at the margins is not peripheral but profoundly transformative and enabling, as it exposes how power is negotiated, how knowledge is localized, and how pedagogy is reimagined, thereby positioning the island teacher as a critical agent who navigates, contests, reshapes, and at times resists dominant structures in order to sustain education that is both socially grounded and intellectually meaningful to him, as an island teacher, to his students, and to the rest of the island community in which he lives.

Declaration of Conflict of Interests
There are no conflicts of interest to declare.

Bionotes

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Appendix A

Interview Questions (in random order)

1. How would you describe the experience of teaching on an island, and what everyday realities or challenges mostly shape your classroom teaching or practice? Could you give an example and elaborate?
2. In what ways do you think teaching on an island places you or your students at the margins of the wider educational system in the Philippines?
3. How do the geographical and social realities of island life shape the opportunities and challenges that your students face compared to those in mainland or mainstream schools of the country?
4. Can you recall a specific classroom moment or incident when your students interpreted a lesson, topic, issue, or phenomenon through their own island experiences? What happened, and what did it reveal to you about how they make meaning? Did you resonate with how they make meaning of that lesson, topic, issue, or phenomenon? Did you have the same interpretation as them?
5. In what ways do local language, gestures, verbal expressions, communication or conversation lingo, or community rituals, habits, or practices influence how you communicate ideas and concepts to your students? Could you give an example and elaborate?
6. Can you describe a moment or incident when you felt the influence of institutional authority, such as school policies, administrators, or curriculum requirements, on your teaching, and how you responded to it in your island context?
7. Have you experienced moments when institutional policies or expectations conflicted with the realities of your own teaching in your island community? How did you navigate those situations of authority and power? Please give an example and elaborate.
8. What signs or cues from students, such as silence, expressions, stories or narratives, or visible behaviour, help you understand their learning and emotional realities and challenges?
9. How has teaching in this island context shaped your identity or sense of self, and belonging as a teacher, and how did it also shape your sense of purpose as an island educator?