



Heritage Voices: Program



Paaralang Pinoy (Filipino School)

St. Bernadette Catholic Church
7600 Old Keene Mill Road, Springfield, VA 22152
www.paaralangpinoy.org

About the Program

Paaralang Pinoy is a community-based, educational, and cultural enrichment program for Filipino-American children from 1st through 5th grade. There are also four kindergartners. The mission of *Paaralang Pinoy* is to help Filipino-heritage children learn the Filipino national language (Tagalog); develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of Filipino culture; cultivate a peer group and network of persons who share a common cultural and linguistic background; facilitate a strong sense of identity; and understand the differences between Filipino and mainstream American culture.

Paaralang Pinoy was established in 2006 by the Filipino Ministry of Northern Virginia (based in St. Bernadette Catholic Church), with the assistance of educator and curriculum specialist Rely Rodriguez, and volunteers from the church. St. Bernadette Catholic Church is a parish in Springfield, VA, with many Filipino-American members. Classes are held at St. Bernadette Catholic School, an affiliate of the church.

Paaralang Pinoy consists of eight adult volunteer teachers, with six teens and young adults acting as *Kuyas* (Big Brothers) and *Ates* (Big Sisters) to the elementary age children. The *Kuyas* and *Ates* range in age from high school to college. They are an important component of the program, because they lead the school-aged children during small-group time and coach them if they do not know the answers to a teacher's question. The *Kuyas* and *Ates* also assist the adult teachers in implementing the school's activities. Currently, *Paaralang Pinoy* has 28 students. In the past, it had as many as 40 students and included middle school students. Almost all of the students were born in the United States.

Classes are held every Sunday from 1:30-3:30 pm from October through May. It is a multi-grade or one-room school. One hour each is devoted to teaching culture and language. *Paaralang Pinoy* teachers use their own teacher-developed curriculum and materials. Culture is taught in English so that all the children may understand the lesson. The following topics are discussed during the year: Typical Filipino Childhood, Folk Dances, Music, Games and Recreation, Food, History, Ecology, Holidays (i.e., Christmas, New Year, and Lent).



Teacher Odette, Ate Jaclyn, Ate Angela, and some of the students take a break during recess.

Language is taught in a conversational manner. The goal of language teaching is to expose the children to the Tagalog language and help the children feel comfortable speaking it. Learning correct grammar is not the aim, and children's mastery of Tagalog is not assessed. Students are presented with communicative situations, such as greetings, introductions and taking leave, phone conversations, asking and responding to questions, counting, expressing time, showing respect, and the like.

Thus, class work may consist of students orally filling in the blanks, guessing words in a picture, reading a rhyme, participating in a dialogue that is read aloud, singing a song, and dividing into groups and answering the teacher's questions as a group. Students are taught correct pronunciation and Tagalog vocabulary related to the topic of the day.

Every fourth week, the teachers conduct a workshop. The workshop's objective is to teach the students new cultural and linguistic skills related to what they have learned in the past three weeks. The teachers host a station, and groups of about five to six students rotate from station to station, spending about 30 minutes each in the activities.

For example, for one workshop, the children went to cooking, singing, and dancing stations. At the cooking station, the teachers demonstrated and then taught the students to make *Pastillas de Leche* (milk candy), *Pichi-pichi* (cassava cake rolled in coconut flakes), and *Tsokolate* (chocolate drink).



Five-and-a-half year old Julius stirs the mixture for Pichi-pichi (cassava cake).

The children were also taught the *Batibot* (Filipino Sesame Street) theme song using Filipino and Western instruments at the singing station, and taught the *tinikling* (dance imitating the *tikling* bird) at the dance station.

Teachers also do a showcase during the workshop, where Filipino artifacts are presented or demonstrated. For example, at the music station, children tried playing the *anklung* (musical instrument made out of two bamboo tubes attached to a bamboo frame). Before Christmas, the *parol* (Christmas star) and other Christmas decorations are displayed, and teachers demonstrate and teach the children how to make decorations such as the *parol* (Christmas star). The teachers plan to hold a workshop every other Sunday, because they have noticed that attendance is better on workshop days, children's participation is more enthusiastic, and the students seem to learn more with the hands-on techniques of the workshops.



Teacher Diane, Kuya Vincent, and students play the Anklung musical instrument.

Every fifth week, teachers do a *Balik-Aral* or review of the past four lessons. The teachers think of fun and innovative ways to review the lessons, such as charades, contests, game shows, and giving out prizes to the group of children who can answer the most questions. Technology is also used inside and outside the classroom. For example, parents are asked to view a YouTube video of *Ama Namin* (the Lord's Prayer) with their children, so that the children can memorize this (sung) prayer learned in class. Also, students and parents are referred to YouTube for step-by-step instructions of Filipino recipes for food discussed in class. Children watch YouTube videos in class that illustrate the songs, musical instruments, dances, games, and other aspects of Filipino culture.

Every quarter, the teacher sends home *Balik-Aral* or review workbooks for the parents and children to read and answer.



Led by Ate Jacklyn, students work on their *Balik-Aral* or review workbook.

In coordination with Feed the Hungry, an organization based in the Washington, DC area that benefits the poor in the Philippines, *Paaralang Pinoy* students also have a service project called "Project *Biiik*" (Tagalog for piglet). The students each receive a piggy bank to fill with coins. At the end of the school year, they turn in the *biiks*, and the money will benefit poor villages in the Philippines. *Paaralang Pinoy* also has a small lending library of Filipino-English bilingual books.



Teacher Rely Rodriguez, a former principal and *Paaralang Pinoy's* Cultural Coordinator, provides training to the teachers at a summer workshop, during which teachers review the past year's lessons and prepare lessons for the coming year. The teachers also meet face-to-face a few times during the year to plan specific events, but most of the coordinating is done via email. Teaching is not so onerous, because the teachers teach a class by themselves only about once a month. The teachers contribute their various professional backgrounds and talents to the school.

Odette Martinez, the school's coordinator, is very pleased that, although some of the teachers have taken sabbatical leaves due to family or job-related needs, almost all of the teachers have stayed since the start of classes in 2007, and more parents are volunteering to teach.

Paaralang Pinoy is a relatively new and small program, but its dedicated teachers and volunteers, active parents, enthusiastic students, and innovative and interactive teaching methods make it a very special school. As Teacher Rely says, *Paaralang Pinoy* thrives because of the Filipino "*bayanihan* (collaboration) spirit."

For its fifth year, it is possible that *Paaralang Pinoy* will expand the language segment of the program because the teachers have found that it takes more time to teach and learn the Tagalog language as compared to general culture.

For more information about *Paaralang Pinoy* in Northern Virginia, [visit the website](#) or [email the coordinator](#), Odette Martinez.

Spotlight on Program Participants



Teacher Diane Auclair with daughters Isabel and Elena Auclair

Seven-year-old Isabel Auclair thinks *Paaralang Pinoy* (Filipino School) is cool, because “I learn the Filipino language,” and “I have good friends” here. Similarly, nine-year-old Elena Auclair likes *Paaralang Pinoy* because “I like to learn the language,” “I like learning about Filipino food and playing Filipino games,” and “It’s lots of fun!” Their mother, Diane Auclair, has been a volunteer teacher at *Paaralang Pinoy* since 2007, and recently became its Language Coordinator. Diane has a BA in Psychology from the University of the Philippines, and an MA in Industrial and Organizational Psychology from Radford University. She worked as a Human Resources Manager in the Philippines and in Washington DC, until she had Elena and Isabel. Asked what she finds exciting about *Paaralang Pinoy*, Diane says: “As a volunteer, I find it exciting to be with like-minded Filipinos, who are devoted to keeping our heritage relevant to the next-generation Filipinos in America. Our curricula have evolved, because we try to discover new ways to share the language and culture. That allows me to keep up with what’s going on in the Philippines, including pop songs, newsmakers, and their accomplishments, that I would have missed if I were not a part of *Paaralang Pinoy*.”

Why is she such a dedicated teacher and Language Coordinator? “Though it requires a substantial time commitment, I find it exciting to be with the other volunteers. They care about sharing our heritage with the children and use their many different talents to do it. I find it rewarding to see the children, and particularly, my girls, comfortable with the culture. My commitment is largely connected to my desire to have the girls be comfortable and familiar with their heritage. As long as I want that for my children, then I will continue to be part of *Paaralang Pinoy*.”

About the Author



Valerie Malabonga has a PhD in Developmental Psychology (George Mason University), and is a Consultant at the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), where she was a staff member for 10 years. While Valerie was a CAL staff member, she conducted research on assessing the language and literacy development of bilingual children, and developed Filipino tests for children and adults for other organizations.

Valerie recently volunteered to help with conducting the workshops for *Paaralang Pinoy*. Her 5½ year old son Julius enjoys attending *Paaralang Pinoy*, because he “is learning his letters” and gaining new friends. Valerie is grateful to *Paaralang Pinoy* for providing her family a community of Filipino-American families determined to maintain their Filipino language and culture in America.

To learn more about Paaralang Pinoy, [read the program profile](#).

The Heritage Voices Program Profile on Paaralang Pinoy was prepared by Valerie Malabonga for the Alliance for the Advancement of Heritage Languages, Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), Washington, DC.

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View the Photo Gallery on the next page.

Photo Gallery



Students try different roles during conversation practice.



Ate Joanna with her group.



Students writing on their *Balik-aral* (review workbooks).



Ate Angela helps with a difficult question.



Students rolling and tasting the *Pastillas de Leche* (milk candy).



Students taste the *tsokolate* (chocolate) drink.