

Learner-Centered Acts of 'Academic Care' within the Practice of Teacher-Centred Instruction of Rural Teachers in Bicol

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Abstract

As the Philippines mandated a shift to learner-centered education as part of its K to 12 reform policy, pedagogical issues on the perceived polarization between good (learner-centered) and bad (traditional teacher-centered) teaching in the country arise. With this research problem, this study used ethnographic research methods in exploring how academic care is embedded within the teacher-centered practice of whole-class lectures of rural teachers in one high school class in Bicol. Ethnographic data offered situated understanding on how teacher-centered pedagogies are valued by rural students both as practices of good teaching and enactments of academic care. This study culminates with a conclusion that the “academic caring,” which manifests a Bikolano cultural valuing of “*pagmakulog*” (a deep sense of personal and compassionate care among companions or “*kaabay*”) provides an important orientation toward understanding how learner-centered approaches could be articulated for the Bikolano context. While the K to 12 reform policy in the Philippines has strong directives to use prescribed instructional strategies for the country’s education to be “truly learner-centered,” this study forwards a notable finding that “academic caring” fostered through student-teacher relationships could offer a possibility which bridges the presumed dichotomy between learner-centered and teacher-centered pedagogies in the Philippines.

Keywords: *learner-centered education; cultural impediments; good pedagogy; Philippine education; teacher-centered instruction; disadvantaged rural schools; Bicol education; student-teacher relationships; academic care*

Introduction

In 2013, the Philippines took a radical shift to K to 12 curriculum by virtue of Republic Act No. 10533, also known as the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, which mandates that the national “curriculum shall be learner-centered” (2). For the curriculum to be learner-centered, SEAMEO-INNOTECH (2012) states that “teacher-centered pedagogical strategies [be] applied.. to a lesser extent” (44). This is because these teacher-centered forms of teaching, as discussed in the 2011 Philippine Senate Economic Planning Office Policy Brief could have attributed to the “lack of interest in attending school and low participation rates” among students and the “decreasing National Achievement Test rates” (3). This reform policy therefore clearly indicates the “Department of Education’s discursive shift to a learner-rather than a teacher-centered education” (Bautista *et al.*, 2009, p. 8).

As the country’s education aspires to be learner-

centered, the Philippines is challenged with several issues in implementing learner-centered teaching approaches in its classrooms. One issue is that the reform policy can be read as placing learner-centered teaching in a binary opposition against teacher-centered instruction, thus potentially creating a simplistic dichotomy between good and bad teaching. This positioning of “bad teaching” in the form of teacher-centered instruction presents as another issue in the way that policymakers and learner-centered reformers provided prescriptions of what good and effective teaching should look like in Philippine classrooms. Such prescriptions, however, are limited to learner-centered instructional strategies (i.e. cooperative learning, critical inquiry, and differentiated instruction, among others) and appear to overlook other teacher classroom practices which, while seemingly “teacher-centered” and “traditional,” may be perceived not only as practices of good teaching but also as a teacher’s acts of care. It is within these critical issues of pedagogy that this study sought to explore by investigating into student and teacher understanding and valuing of what constitutes

good teaching within one junior class in a disadvantaged rural school in Naga City, Philippines.

In the next section, I provide a brief discussion on pedagogical caring as one of the cornerstones of learner-centered education. It is important to note that learner-centered education, as used in this study, refers to a teaching paradigm developed in 1993 by the American Psychological Association in collaboration with the Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory (McREL), which was used as a framework for the education reform in the US and has been widely disseminated to educators and researchers across the US and abroad through the works of Barbara McCombs and colleagues (McCombs & Whisler 1997). Within the next discussion, I examine the extent to which pedagogical care within positive student-teacher relationships is effective as learner-centered practice in increasing student engagement and achievement in various contexts.

Fostering student-teacher relationships

Of all the learner-centered practices, King (2003) claims that “the most predictive of student success is creating positive interpersonal relationships” (154). Such claim is supported in a meta-analysis by Cornelius-White (2007) who reviewed 1,000 articles on student-teacher relationships from 1948 to 2004. From these available research, Cornelius-White (2007) synthesized 119 studies which reveal that there is a substantial association between person-centered teacher variables (i.e. affective variables like showing warmth and empathy; instructional variables like encouraging learning or developing higher order thinking) and student outcomes (i.e. cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes). Of all person-centered teacher variables, Cornelius-White’s (2007) findings show that the affective variables particularly “showing warmth and empathy” within positive student-teacher relationships have the strongest association with student outcomes. Simply put, learner-centered student-teacher relationships, as Cornelius-White (2007) concludes, are effective in promoting student success in terms of participation, critical thinking, satisfaction, dropout prevention, self-esteem, reduction of disruptive behavior, and perceived achievement, among others.

Several other studies have also shown the positive effect of positive teacher-student relationships on various aspects of student learning such as increasing engagement in academic learning (van Uden *et al.*, 2014), creating prosocial classrooms where socioemotional competence is cultivated (Jennings & Greenberg, 2008); promoting student resilience and well-being in school (Johnson,

2008); and sustaining motivation among students and developing them into self-regulated learners (Fredricks *et al.*, 2004). Positive relationships in the classroom are also found to benefit students of challenging backgrounds in the study of Roorda and colleagues (2011). In their meta-analytic investigation on the associations between affective qualities of teacher-student relationships and students’ school engagement and achievement, Roorda and colleagues (2011) report that positive relationships in the classroom are important for diverse groups of students, from students who are academically at risk to disadvantaged economic backgrounds, and children with learning difficulties to students in mature ages.

Similarly, students at risk, including those who live in poverty and in disadvantaged learning contexts are the focus in the study of Johnson (2008) where positive teacher-student relationships are shown to have a positive impact on their well-being and resilience at school despite their challenging personal backgrounds. Drawing on qualitative data from a longitudinal study, Johnson (2008) used student voices to examine how simple everyday connections between the teacher and the students are critical in supporting students cope better in their studies despite difficulties in their lives at home and in school. Some of these simple practices which teachers can do in promoting resilience at school as part of fostering teacher-student relationships in the classroom are (1) making themselves available and accessible to students; (2) engaging students by actively listening to their concerns and worries; (3) showing empathy with, and understanding of, their students’ “tough” circumstances yet providing them with positive strategies to deal with adversity; (4) advocating for their students by mobilizing existing support provisions that are available for “at-risk” students; and (5) remembering the “human touches” that promote prosocial bonding between teachers and students (Johnson, 2008, p. 395). Most of these practices suggest a particular attention on the affective domain of student learning and lean toward a demonstration of care for students. This relational care or “pedagogical caring” as studies on learner-centered teaching refer to, holds its centrality in learner-centered teaching given its significant impact on promoting student engagement and achievement.

Pedagogical caring

The notion of “care” is emerging as an important component of effective teaching (Velasquez *et al.*, 2013). In a study of King (2003) on pedagogical caring within the framework of learner-centered education, students revealed that they are more motivated to learn when they

perceived their teachers were using learner-centered practices that involve caring. The students reported that learner-centered practices which they perceived from their teachers as care are (1) embracing democratic interaction styles, (2) developing positive expectations with regard to students' individual differences, (3) modeling a caring attitude toward their own work, and (4) providing constructive feedback (King, 2003, p. 156). Despite the increasing evidence on the benefits of pedagogical caring on student learning, there is, however, a need to further examine the theoretical contributions of care on education and to understand how teachers are perceived as caring in different contexts and communities (Panthi *et al.*, 2018). Caring is after all, as Velasquez and colleagues (2013) argue, contextual and varies depending on the location and educational setting. This contextual nature of caring is a significant finding in a qualitative study of Garza (2009) which used comparative analysis in identifying and describing caring practices of teachers perceived by Latino and White students. Findings of the students' perceptions in Garza's (2009) study show that caring teachers (1) provide scaffolding during a teaching episode, (2) reflect a kind disposition through actions, (3) are always available to the student, (4) show a personal interest in the student's well-being inside and outside the classroom, (5) and provide affective academic support in the classroom setting (p. 310).

The centrality of care in student success also appears among studies in disadvantaged schools. For instance, in investigating the instructional practices of an eighth-grade teacher in a rural high school, Azano (2011) found that one way of effectively engaging rural high school students is to (1) use classroom practices which connect students to their community and (2) teach curriculum content that are relevant to their rural place. While these practices resemble "traditional pedagogies," Azano (2011) claims that when teachers incorporate these practices into their instruction, they are more able to encourage students to construct their own understanding of their rural community. Similarly, Hardre (2007) observes that this close relationship with the community is influential in keeping rural students in schools and motivating them to achieve. This "social cohesiveness" among rural communities is what Hardre (2007) claims as the highly valuable feature of rural schools and a strong contributor to the success of rural students.

Hardre's (2007) notion of social cohesiveness exhibited through caring relationships within rural communities resonate with the concept of *kaabay* (a Bicol word which roughly translates to "neighbor") as discussed in the Bicol-based study of Conde (2006) which suggests

that *kaabay* refers to people who were close to each other not only due to blood relations, but also due to "reciprocal caring relationships. The members of the *kaabay* care for each other in both material and nonmaterial ways" (p. 35-36). This notion of caring relationships within *kaabay* is also explored in a phenomenological study of Ramos (2008) which describes the concept of *kaabay* as the strong and personal sense of compassion and resilience he observed among neighbors in rural communities in Bicol during difficult situations such as typhoons. Ramos (2008) found that the contextual realities within the Bicol rural community, particularly the frequency of typhoons and the social-economic impact on the village, elicited caring relationships among its neighbors. Ramos (2008) further claims that the term *kaabay* then transcends its literal meaning of "neighbor" to a deeper meaning of "companion" when over time, the rural villagers develop a deep sense of compassion to help each other, knowing that the suffering of one neighbor is also shared by the other.

While rural public schools are far removed from city centers and largely depend on their local economic and cultural resources, these very realities are also responsible for pulling rural communities together. Rural schools are, as Hardre and Hennessey (2010) raised, often characterized with descriptors of low achievement and motivation among students. Rural schools are also presumed to be incapable of providing their students with the same academic and extracurricular support and resources compared with urban schools. However, despite these presumptions that beset rural schools, the works of Hardre and Hennessey (2010) consistently emphasized that there are successes and advantages in rural schools that often go unacknowledged.

The earlier discussion so far has shown the need for studies on pedagogical caring to be expanded, especially in the context of rural schools in countries which have recently adopted learner-centered education as part of their national reforms. This can be achieved through qualitative and ethnographic studies which examine how relational care is practiced, understood, and valued in the context of learner-centered teaching within rural schools. Ethnographic studies could then provide a more informed ground in understanding relational care as a practice of good pedagogy in a deeper level of culture, shedding light in understanding the existing dichotomy between learner-centered and teacher-centered pedagogies within specific places in the Philippines.

Materials and Methods

The studies on relational care and community relationship I discussed so far suggest the centrality of pedagogical care in learner-centered education—a theme which is overlooked as an effective practice of teaching within the context of the Philippine education reform policy which appears to limit learner-centered strategies to prescribed instructional strategies such as cooperative learning, critical inquiry, and differentiated instruction, among others. Such prescriptions can also be read as placing learner-centered teaching in a binary opposition against teacher-centered instruction, thus potentially creating a simplistic dichotomy between good and bad teaching. It is in this dichotomy that this study seeks to explore by examining teacher and student perceptions of what constitutes good teaching in one junior class in a rural high school in Bicol. With this aim, I explored three research questions. First, how do teachers in a junior class within a rural disadvantaged high school understand, value, and set out to practice good teaching? Second, which teacher practices do the teacher's students' school find helpful in their learning? And third, to what extent are these teacher and student views consistent with what the researcher observes to be effective use of learner-centered and teacher-centered pedagogies within the class in the study?

To address the three research questions, I used the ethnographic methods of classroom observation, focus group interviews with students, in-depth interviews with individual teachers, which allowed me to gather rich and thick narratives about what the teachers and students understand and value as practices of good teaching. In engaging in the fundamental elements of participation, observation, and conversation (Atkinson *et al.*, 2003) in ethnography, I gained a more holistic view of what actually happens in the classroom, thus optimized the methodological rigor of my ethnographic study.

To address the research question, how do teachers in a junior urban high school understand, value, and set out to practice good teaching, I conducted semi-structured interviews with eight rural teachers who consented to have the interviews audio-recorded. My interviews with individual teachers took place before, during, and after the classroom observation phase of my fieldwork. The interviews I conducted before and during the period of classroom observation lasted between 15 to 20 min while the post-observation individual teacher interviews lasted between 60 to 90 min. These semi-structured interviews allowed me to ask teachers about what I observed in the junior class.

To address the research question, to what extent are teacher and student views consistent with what an observer sees as an effective use of learner-centered and teacher-centered pedagogies, I then conducted daily classroom observation in the junior class in the rural school for four weeks in early July until late September of 2015.

To address the research question, which of the teacher practices do urban students find helpful in their learning, I conducted a total of six focus group interviews with the students who took part in this research. The interviews lasted for one hour, with six to seven students in a group. These interviews were conducted once a day within the final week of observation during lunch breaks. With consent from each student, I audio-recorded the interviews to allow for later transcription and analysis.

Selection of participants

Consistent with the traditions of ethnography, the sampling technique in this study is both purposive and opportunistic. The purposive element of my sampling had me select a rural school in which my sampling was opportunistic, as I took the direction of the school principal, who determined which class group and set of teachers I should study. In selecting a class in the rural school, I was designated by its school principal to observe a junior class which is composed of mixed-level ability students aged 13 to 16. While not technically called an "honors class," this grade-eight class of 39 students, 22 boys and 17 girls, is where the top-performing junior students are placed. It is also from this class that student representatives for various school and citywide academic competitions such as quiz bees and other extracurricular contests are selected. There are eight teachers teaching eight different subjects in this junior class.

Ethics of the study

It is imperative for me as the researcher that all participants in my study are fully informed about my study. Informed consent for the students was obtained from them, their parents, and their class adviser. Consent for teachers was obtained from them and their school principal. Ethics approval was received from the Division Schools Superintendent and from The University of Melbourne Human Research Ethics Committee, with the Ethics ID 1443489.

The rural school

Surrounded by acres of rice fields, this rural high school is a public and nationally-funded educational

institution. It is located approximately 30 km away from the city center and close to the foot of Mt. Isarog. This rural school can be reached within a two-hour commute via trimobile or jeepney, the two main forms of transportation in the province. At the time of my class observations in 2015, this rural school has an average of 483 enrollees each year coming from nearby farming communities of around 1,571 households. From the census report in 2015, the families in this village are mostly living in makeshift housing or classified as informal settlers registered with high cases of poverty, malnutrition, and illiteracy. With its total population of 7,917, this rural village has the record of the highest rate of poverty threshold in the province in 2015. In the same year, this rural village also had high rates of high school dropouts with 41.8% of its children, aged 12 to 15 years, old not attending high school.

The rural class

The above-described context provides a frame through which to consider the special nature of the class I observed in the rural school. This junior class was one of the two classrooms who participated in my ethnographic study on the conceptions of good pedagogy in the Philippines where I examined teacher and student perceptions of what constitutes good teaching in two junior classes—one in an inner urban disadvantaged public school and the other located in a much poorer rural community. This class was chosen for the further analysis reported here because while I observed that the rural teachers' instructional practices are predominantly "teacher-centered" instruction and did not perceive them to practice good teaching, their students perceived otherwise. These 39 rural students also reported that the teacher practices which I observed as "teacher-centered" were viewed by them as acts of care. This class, therefore, provided an interesting case in that the narratives of the class gained through teacher interviews, student focus groups, and classroom observations seem to disrupt the presumed binary between teacher-centered and learner-centered pedagogies. This class, therefore, offers a venue to further examine the subtle and often ignored cultural dimensions of what is valued as practices of good teaching and acts of care within this rural school.

Results and Discussion

Before proceeding to the discussion of the researcher's ethnographic findings, it is important to note that the use of lectures, recitations, and drills as traditional

methods of teaching as a response to how "students learn best" antagonizes some fundamental concepts of learner-centered teaching. The practice of lecture method, categorized as "teacher-centered," alongside the use of student drills, which is associated with the phrase "drill and kill," are criticized for promoting rote learning and failing to develop higher forms of thinking such as critical reasoning and creativity (Cuban, 1983; Meece, 2003; McCombs & Miller, 2007). Crumly and colleagues (2014) contend that lecture method is a "very traditional approach to teaching and learning, this method does not always meet all the learning styles of students. Truth be told, teacher-centered learning is less a pedagogical method than it is a habit based on suppositions about what's more difficult or personally convenient" (p. 5).

Practice of lecture method is an act of 'academic care'

Of the classroom practices which support the rural students' academic learning, it is their teachers' "well-explained straight lectures" which they perceive as the most helpful. These lectures are, as the rural students reported across five focus group interviews, effectively carried out by their two teachers—Mrs. Alab, their English teacher, and Mrs. Agham, their Science teacher. By lectures, the rural students refer to a way of teaching where their teacher is "standing in front of the class" (in Focus Group 2) and "providing discussions for the whole class" (Focus Group 3) while the students are "sitting in rows and silently paying attention to the lecture" (Focus Group 5). While I observed these two teachers to strongly practice traditional and teacher-centered methods of teaching, their rural students identified Mrs. Alab and Mrs. Agham as the good and caring teachers, because as the rural students explained, "they give the most engaging lectures." Mrs. Agham for instance, is perceived by these rural students as an "engaging lecturer" because she "does not read lessons from the book," "brings pictures or actual objects to class," and "makes lessons relatable by sharing either funny or inspiring stories in her lectures". On one hand, the rural students particularly find Mrs. Alab's lectures engaging because she "does not mind repeating explanations of the lesson," "gives as many examples as possible until the concept is clear," "provides seatwork after the lectures," and most importantly, "encourages recitation during lectures."

Providing opportunities for class recitations within lectures

Across five different focus groups, the rural students identified Mrs. Alab's practice of "encouraging

recitations” during her whole-class lectures as helpful in learning well. I did not, however, observe Mrs. Alab used graded or scripted student recitations as described in literature which critiqued teacher-centered methods (Cuban, 1983; Crumly *et al.*, 2014). By “recitations,” the rural students are referring to instances when Mrs. Alab “asks several spontaneous questions within her lecture,” which, as one student, Boyet, describes, “give us fair chance to participate in class where we can freely give answers not found in books.” Another student in a different focus group, Vilma, identifies Mrs. Alab’s “recitation” as helpful in “making the lessons very clear” because Mrs. Alab’s questions assist them in “seeing the bigger picture.” Vilma further narrates, “if not many of us are raising hands to recite, Mrs. Alab takes it that we do not yet understand, so she doesn’t mind repeating her lectures for us.”

Within my four weeks of classroom observation in Mrs. Alab’s class, I noted that what the rural students described as “recitation” aligns more with direct instruction (Rosenshine & Stevens, 1986) given that Mrs. Alab’s lectures are punctuated with questions which aim to monitor and firm up student understanding. To some extent, Mrs. Alab’s practice of whole-class “lectures and recitations,” as how the students call it, also match the practices used by “active teachers” which are reported in “teacher-effect” (process-outcome) studies as effective in promoting student learning (Reynolds, 1998). In these studies, it was reported that “in general, effective teachers have been found to teach a concept, then ask questions to test children’s understanding, and if the material did not seem well understood, to reteach the concept, followed by more monitoring” (Reynolds, 1998, p. 150).

Why do rural students perceive care from teachers who lecture?

While Mrs. Alab’s teaching practices may appear to outside observers as teacher-centered, her lectures accompanied with clear explanations and questions challenge the presumptions held against direct instruction and interactive whole-class teaching. These teacher-centered approaches are largely criticized for promoting only rote learning among students (Schug, 2003; Goetze, 2009). This is, however, contested by Tan and Abbas (2009) in their critique on the practice of traditional teaching methods in Southeast Asian classrooms (i.e. Singapore). They argued that while more teacher-centered approaches are used (in Singapore), the focus is not on the memorization of facts, but on the students’ understanding of key concepts. A direct teaching is often accompanied by an explanation of a rationale for the

prescribed belief or action (Tan & Abbas, 2009, p. 30).

Tan and Abbas’ (2009) claim that direct instruction assists students’ conceptual understanding is particularly evident in the responses of Bobot, one of the students whom I observed taking a nap in Mr. Ugma’s class.

Bobot’s story and the stories of his classmates

Bobot is one of the students who work as porters at the city market every other day at dawn. Mr. Ugma, the class adviser and Music, Arts, PE teacher (who explained to me Bobot’s situation during the teacher interview) allows Bobot to nap while in class but has to attend remedial instruction after school for the lessons he missed in Mr. Ugma’s class. Bobot, however, as I observed, is particularly awake in Mrs. Alab’s class (which comes after Mr. Ugma’s class at 8:45 a.m.). I also observed that Bobot actively participates in Mrs. Alab’s class, frequently “reciting”—raising his hand along others to bid Mrs. Alab’s attention to call him, and when called, Bobot stands to face his classmates and answers Mrs. Alab’s question.

During our focus group interview, Bobot openly shares his thoughts on how Mrs. Alab’s lectures and class recitations help him do better in school. He explains that during these recitations, Mrs. Alab asks questions which he can actually answer despite not being able to study the night before. Mrs. Alab’s lectures and recitations do not only help him learn well, but also gives him the opportunity to improve his academic performance in class because, as Bobot explains, “I don’t have to be bookish to answer her questions. [I don’t have] to say exactly what’s in the textbook. If that’s the case, I couldn’t recite as much because I don’t have my own textbook. That’s why I recite frequently in her class, I just have to say what’s in my mind.”

Bobot also reveals that recitations in Mrs. Alab’s class enable them to get “bonus points for their ‘class standing’ so they couldn’t really fail the subject should they have low scores in our exams.” With this response from Bobot, I inquired further:

Me: Why is it important for you not to fail this class?

Bobot: Because life is hard. Life is harder when you’re not educated.

Me: If you have to choose, would you rather just have to focus on your studies and not worry about working?

Bobot: [Paused to wipe tears] Yes, but I want to help

my parents. I want to help our family have a better life. If I don't study hard, we will always be like this.

In listening to the stories these rural students share, particularly the one told by Bobot, I noted that there is a strong common theme of "helping my family" across all focus groups. This theme constantly appears among student narratives which tell stories of both their difficulties and determination in pursuing their studies. This suggests that "helping my family" is the driving force behind every rural student's effort of reciting in class while sleep-deprived (Bobot), paying attention in lectures even when very hungry (Jay-ar), studying hard even at home where there is no electricity (Jona), walking to school to save money (Arnel), preparing homework while doing house chores or taking care of siblings (Cory), coming to class every day then working on the farm on weekends (Pedro), and generally doing well in school despite challenging conditions at home and in the rural village. Such responses of these rural students identify convergence of findings among Philippine studies (i.e. Ligo-Ralph, 1990; Jocano, 1997; Magno, 2010; Okabe, 2013), which support a conclusion that Filipinos have high regard for education because it is considered instrumental not only in achieving personal life goals but most importantly, in securing a better future for the entire family.

"I want to help my family"

These rural students speak vigorously about their aspirations for their family, goals which they believe can be achieved by studying hard and completing high school. This is evident in the response of Jona, who dreams of being a nurse in the city, so she can help her parents and, as she narrates, "take away the burden from them of worrying for our future and living a difficult life". To achieve this, Jona promises to study hard and earn a degree because, "I want to make them proud that even if we are poor, they are able to send me to school. I would like to honor my parents' sacrifices for me". Jona's responses give context to Jocano's (1992) claim that Filipinos value education as a part of a legacy that parents leave to their children. Because of this orientation, the Filipino child continues to value this legacy by exerting effort and working hard in school. Filipino youth are expected by their parents to earn college degrees or at the least, complete high school, as a source of both pride and inspiration in the family. The child exerts effort to meet these standards because it is valued in Philippine culture (Jocano & Mendez, 1979; Jocano, 1992).

Sharing a similar view with Jona, another student,

Niño is committed to complete his studies, this way, as he illustrates, "I could give back to my parents and to my community. But it's hard to do this if one is uneducated. I think one becomes a better person when she or he is able to go to school." Also, Niño wishes to help his parents by studying hard, so he can qualify for a scholarship that can get him to a university near Manila where he plans to earn his bachelor's in agriculture. This way, as Niño explains, "I can go back and help my father run his own farm, maybe grow coconuts or mangoes. This way, he does not need to go to the other village to work as a contract laborer during rice harvest season." Niño's responses echo Magno's (2010) notion that Filipinos see the educational process in school as indispensable for living a "full life" as a person—a person who lives in, with, and for the community. Filipinos strongly believe that there are values and skills which can only be learned in school; therefore, a person's (Filipino) value is deepened and becomes fulfilled when educated. This notion of "personhood" among Filipinos is actualized when one's talents and skills learned in school are shared with the community. Such skill becomes a person's contribution to the good of the community, making her or him a valuable member of the society. This is evident in Niño's response, as he further illustrates the importance of his teacher's practice of lectures:

To realize my dream, I want my teacher to help me learn stuff. That's why I want my teachers to really care for my learning. I need them to give lectures and explain well so I will really learn.

Niño's response gives context to King's (2003) notion of care which, as she argues, "should be empowering" because "limiting care to emotional or sentimental caring can be dysfunctional without intention or plans to prepare students for skills needed to live" (p. 156). Therefore, critical to caring is "giving students, particularly those at risk, lifelong learning skills to improve their life circumstances" (King, 2003, p. 156). Clearly, the perceptions of these rural students toward their teacher's lectures and "recitations" as practices of "good teaching" (while being "teacher-centered" methods) could be accounted to how these practices directly respond to their "expressed needs" (Noddings, 2012, p. 773) as learners and fulfil the "cultural expectations of education" (Livingston *et al.*, 2017, p. 13). This could also explain the rural students' perception of care from teacher-centered practices, as these address their actual needs as learners within the rural community and further support their personal goals for their family.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study culminates with a conclusion that the academic caring, which manifests a Bikolano cultural valuing of “*pagmakulog*” (a deep sense of personal and compassionate care among companions or *kaabay*) provides an important orientation toward understanding how learner-centered approaches could be articulated for the Bikolano context. While the K to 12 reform policy in the Philippines has strong directives to use prescribed instructional strategies for the country’s education to be “learner-centered,” this study has raised a notable finding that academic caring fostered through student-teacher relationships could offer a possibility which bridges the presumed binary between learner-centered and teacher-centered pedagogies in the Philippines.

Future researchers on good teaching could consider the strong and urgent need for a deeper understanding of both learner-centered and teacher-centered classroom practices under a cultural lens through use of qualitative ethnographic research. Ethnographic studies on learner-centered education could provide a deeper understanding that the student as the learner is a person at the center of concentric circles of communities—the family, the classroom, the school, the neighborhood, and the immediate local community—each has a distinct set of expectations for this student to fulfil. It is this reframing of the “learner” within “learner-centered teaching” that ethnographic research such as this study seeks to contribute to the body of knowledge in teaching and pedagogy.

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