

Exploring educational politics in two local colleges in Cebu Province, Philippines

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Abstract – *This study attempts to provide a modest contribution to the field of educational politics or politics of education, an area least explored by most educational scholars in the Philippines. This looks at how the experience of two local colleges and universities (LCUs), which catered primarily for underprivileged youths, have confronted issues beyond the immediate realm of education i.e. politics, patronage and contestation for power and influence. Distinct from the private tertiary higher education institutions and State Universities and Colleges of the country, these LCUs have been growing substantially nationwide for the past decade. Yet, what appears to be an uncharted territory for most local governments, the venture into the higher education has been regarded as a form of poverty alleviation and investment in human development especially that these caters primarily to the poor and underprivileged. This study however reveals that these schools are beset with both institutional and curricular challenges. Using key informant interviews, reviewing various pertinent documents and analysing published articles in local and national broadsheets pertaining to the said colleges, the experience of the two LCUs demonstrated how contentious public education ventures can be. As such, it engenders resistance and opposition which ultimately compel its stakeholders to navigate through the political process.*

Keywords – *higher education institutions, local colleges and universities, local government units, politics, politics of education*

INTRODUCTION

Local government initiated tertiary schools in the Philippines are called as ‘Local Colleges and Universities (LCUs)’. Institutionalized after the passage of the 1991 Local Government Code, the decentralization law of the Philippines, LCUs are distinct from the other public higher education institutions (HEIs) of the country i.e. State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) whose budgetary allocation is determined by the national congress and the central government.

Variouly named as “community colleges”, “public colleges”, “local colleges”, “municipal colleges” or “city colleges” depending on their degree of urbanization and the geographic milieu it is located nationwide, these LCUs were established by their respective local government units or LGUs through an enabling local ordinance and financially supported by the concerned LGU (i.e. province, city, municipality and barangays or villages).

Notwithstanding, their existence and presence contributed greatly to governance, higher education and public policy. Dayrit argued that it is the only hope for

underprivileged children of poor Filipino families for acquiring a college education [1]. Chao posited that LCUs address the higher educational gaps at the local level [2], while Pernia noted LCUs are investment in human development and social services provision [3]. Montemar, Recio, Hecita and dela Cruz considers them as poverty alleviation intervention and crime-curbing mechanism of local governments [4].

In a country like Philippines whose higher educational sector is plagued by private-for-profit schools, massive student enrolments, and over the years, Manalang [5], Walfish [6], Orbeta [7], Licuanan [8] argued that access and quality of higher education has remained seriously inadequate and in a state of deterioration. Given this, local colleges’ potential role in addressing these challenges offers an interesting prospect for educational change and educational policy. Be that as it may, CHED [9], [10] and Tan [11] pointed out that there persist issues and concerns regarding how LCUs would respond to the challenges of globalization.

Some researchers interested in the interface of politics and higher education in the country have documented these dynamics in the experiences of

several LGUs engage in this educational venture e.g. the study of Sibonga Community College by Pernia [12] and Dulay's comparative study of two LCUs in San Juan and Marikina in Metro Manila [13]. Both studies, however separated by income and geography, revealed gradations of power and influence of local political leaders in the educational policy of these public colleges, while similarly noting instances of positive measures in solving tertiary education needs among its poor residents. Yet, while these studies noted nuances of politics in education, it did not employ the discourse of 'politics of education' as the heuristic device in making sense of the dynamics between what was originally perceived as an educational venture and has arguably transformed into a political endeavor.

This study contributes toward addressing that academic gap by documenting and analyzing 'politics of education', as a framework that takes places in localities within these public colleges. Rather than focus exclusively on the educative impact of decentralization of higher education expressed in the creation of these local colleges, this research explores how the discourse of politics of education manifests in the experiences of two city colleges (Mandaue City College and Talisay City College) in Mandaue and Talisay, in the province of Cebu island in the Philippines. The experience of these two Cebu-based LCUs exhibit instances of political intervention, as the latter went on for several months having different campus presidents escalated by the conflict between the incumbent school president and the newly-elected city mayor, and, the former has been dragged into a tussle between who's the 'legitimate' city college. Prompted by such dynamics, this study looks into: (1) how the experience of both city colleges be viewed under the rubric of 'politics of education' approach; and (2) how the realities of local political dynamics shape the venture of both city colleges.

Framework and Methodology

This paper uses "politics of education" or educational politics as a framework of analysis. Johnson argued that the framework is an eclectic field that sought to incorporate notions of power, influence and authority in the allocation of scarce and valued resources at various levels of the education sector [14]. Scribner, Aleman and Maxcy [15] and Stout, Tallerico and Scribner [16] added that politics of education centers on the enduring value conflicts of efficiency, quality, equity and choice in educational settings, whose intellectual roots and development can be traced to political science.

Wong noted that most education policies are shaped by the broader political institutions and decision-making process and thus foster deeper conceptualization of power structure and democratic practice [17].

Much of the primary source of data for this research are from key informant interviews (KIIs) and document review. Pierce as cited in Go, noted that KIIs were employed to extract the experiences of the respondents to reveal the behavioral patterns of the actors, and to check and validate the accounts of other interviews conducted [18]. There were 7 (seven) key informants for this study who held positions as teachers and administrators of both city colleges, local public officials of the city government, and an official from Region VII of Commission on Higher Education. They were selected based on their intimate knowledge of the experiences of these city colleges. Conducting in-depth interviews with these local personalities were necessary as they can provide insights regarding the dynamics of the interface of politics and education experienced in these governmental-cum-educational ventures. The interview was conducted using a semi-structured questionnaire organized in such a manner that the informants can speak freely on the topic, and the researcher can probe on matters that need further substantiation. The interview lasted about 30-45 minutes. This was done with an aid of a tape recorder.

This article also used document review like school records, newspaper articles and government documents pertaining to LCUs. The coverage period of the documents specifically the newspaper articles perused in this study is between 2007, when the first issue of Mandaue City College surfaced up to 2016, after the recently concluded national and local election which saw the re-election of the former political patron of the city of Talisay who was instrumental in the creation of the Talisay City College. Burnham as cited by Go, posits that Document review helps to develop novel accounts and interpretations of significant events [19]. The actual interviews and document gathering were conducted between January 2014 and April 2016. Upholding the standards of research ethics, informed consent from all respondents were secured prior to the said methodologies.

McLendon emphasized that the comparative case study approach is used here which can "serve as an important corrective to the "black box" tendency that sometimes attends positivist research" [20].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Mandaue City College: From an educational setting to issues of school governance and the political bickering

Mandaue City College (MCC) is a local government higher educational institution in the city of Mandaue, Cebu. Accredited by the Commission on Higher Education, the country's main agency on higher education, it was originally established by the enactment of Sangguniang Panglungsod (City Council) Ordinance No. 10-2005-324A, which was subsequently revised on October 11, 2010 pursuant to City Council Ordinance No. 12-2010-58, known as the "Revised Charter of the Mandaue City College."

The programs offers nine undergraduate programs with their accompanying specializations and three specialized diploma courses e.g. among others, Bachelor in Elementary Education, Bachelor in Secondary Education, Bachelor of Science in Business administration and Bachelor of Science in Information Technology. Most city officials interviewed highlighted the role that the public college plays in the serving primarily to children of poor and underprivileged families. Moreover, the establishment of MCC is viewed as a response to the need for a more affordable alternative from private colleges. There was really a need to create a local college as there students who cannot afford to go to private colleges and even to public state colleges. This is true even if the city has grown so big economically and geographically proximate to the provincial capital, Cebu City—the hub of major universities in the region and the province.

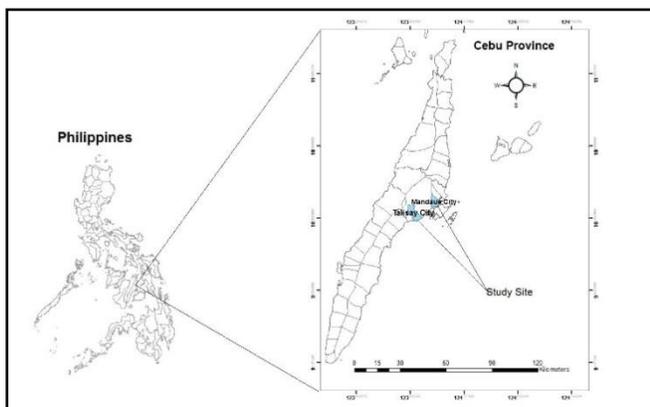


Figure 1. Study Site. The author would like to acknowledge the help of Ms. Cora Jane Lawas of the University of the Philippines Cebu's Central Visayas Studies Center (CVSC) in the production of the map.

This sense of optimism however would be put to the brink of disarray as the city college will be saddled

by controversies. The city of Mandaue would be put asunder with two similarly named Mandaue City Colleges; one is accredited by the CHED and financially supported by the city government, and the other operates privately under the administration of the former College Administrator of MCC in 2005, who claims to be the "real" and "legitimate" Mandaue City College, but were not given government authority.

It was established on 2005 during the incumbency of the former mayor Thadeo "Teddy" Ouano. However his administration was marred by allegations of corruption. He was suspended by the Ombudsman due to improper use of funds in 2007[21], though it was subsequently dismissed due to lack of sufficient evidence in 2011. Being unable to run for office since he served office for three successive electoral cycle already, his son ran in his stead in that year's local election but was defeated by then City Mayor Jonas Cortes [22]. The conflict began during the interim period when the Ouano was serving suspension allowing Vice Mayor Adelino Seno in 2007 [23] to assume the Mayoralty, revealing several "anomalies concerning government funds that were not liquidated from the college administrator." Most officials both from the college and city asserted that they made repeated demands for the then administrator to render accounting of the college expenses, unfortunately he did not satisfactorily complied them. Thus, the OIC Mayor appointed a new college administrator, Dr. Susana Cabahug; of which the incumbent administrator, Dr. Paulus Maria Cañete, stood in firm opposition claiming he is the "rightful" administrator as per city ordinance. Dr. Cabahug even boldly claimed that during the 2007 local election, the college was used as a vehicle for the political campaign of the son of the suspended mayor who was running as Mayor then.

Increasingly attracting local and national media's attention [24]-[28], the Regional office of the Commission on Higher Education mediated to resolve the matter. CHED official said that the regulatory body only acted after several reports and complaints were made about the gravity of the whole situation. He emphasized that CHED had absolutely empty know-how about the nature and extent of the matter until they conducted their own investigation.

"...We found out that, based on the local ordinance, the college administrator who was removed has the right to stay until six years. However, there were members of the city council who opposed to the leadership of the administrator and was asked to step down,

graciously. It was this time then when the two parties filed cases and counter lawsuit against one another.”

This deposed administrator, boldly defied the act, and established a separate campus possessing exactly the name of the Mandaue City College located in a different barangay within the city. The resulting effect was, there now exist two similarly named city college in the province and in Mandaue City. Given this, CHED Region VII and Mandaue City Government filed a legal action against the former MCC Administrator to stop the operation of this other school. In fact, on July 4, 2011, CHED Chairperson Dr. Patricia Licuanan by virtue of Commission *En Banc* Resolution No. 163-2011 issued “Notice to the Public” informing that the Mandaue City College (MCC) under the administration of the former college administrator “has no legal personality to operate a local college and the degrees offered are spurious and illegal and shall not be recognized by the Commission.”

Governmental intervention in public colleges: good politics and bad politics

When queried about the conflict with the city government and the MCC campus he established, Cañete bluntly pointed out that it is the intervention of politics as the reason how and why there exist two similarly named local colleges in Mandaue City.

“It becomes the reason why there are two Mandaue City Colleges because if politics will involve in local colleges; the problem is, if the president (college) is not with the mayor, politically or ideologically, the present mayor will create his own college because, the first thing he will do is to take out the present president and change it to his own men. That is the problem of most local colleges nationwide. There is really too much politics.”

This will be echoed by a Commission on Higher Education (CHED) official who argued that the operation of all local colleges must be separated or detached from the “vagaries of politics from their respective LGUs,” and that “whatever is your political persuasion or from whatever political camp you belong to, it must be not be used against you.” As emphasized in a clearly worded statement in its school website [29]:

“Any contrary publication is without factual legal bases. The issues and propagandas that are

arising are due to bad politics and the failure of Mandaue City Officials to find a win-win solutions for the students, faculty and staff of Mandaue City College. Assuming CHED Closure Order exists, it was not legally validated if CHED has the authority and power to issue such order. Without the Court judgment invalidating the existence of the College, CHED have usurped themselves ascendancy unilaterally not to recognize MCC. CHED should have at least waited for final judgment from the Supreme Court whether or not MCC validly exists.”

Moreover, Cañete lambasted how the organizational structure of local colleges works which puts the Mayor as the Chair of the Board of Trustees or Directors, the highest governing body of the college. Arguing that there is no continuity in the management of the school given this structure, Cañete argued that the mind-set of every mayor is to change the existing college administrator who is not ideologically or politically affiliated with him. In addition, Cañete said that his desire to oppose the Mayor and several members of the city council is to argue that:

“...the local college should not be politicize and these local college should be taken out from politics. Rather, the local college is a way of professionalizing your municipality, your city. So, let us do away with politics in local colleges...For me, good education is good politics. So, the mayor should look into quality education and then disregard politics. One must be a good quality educator politician for you to be a good leader. Because, if you are a good educator politician, your politics is also better.”

This former college administrator is also very adamant that he does not have political affiliation with the previous Mayor, but only supported him because Ouano appointed him.

“It just so happen that I was chosen. But I am not politically-inclined with the previous Mayor. I am really neutral. But naturally, of course, I would fight for the previous Mayor because he was the one who appointed me as the President of the city college.”

Meanwhile, as this debacle happens, some students were profoundly affected. One student leader recalled

that one time when they encounter several other students from the 'other' campus asserting that theirs is the only "legitimate" and "real" college.

Talisay City College: A tale of two claimants on the college presidency

Talisay City College (TCC) is the first local college in the province of Cebu. It was established on 2004 thru the City Ordinance No. 2004-05, by then Mayor Eduardo Gullas [30] (now re-elected as Mayor of Talisay in the recently concluded 2016 local election), to serve the poor constituents of the city of Talisay. It offers degree programs in Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSED), Bachelor of Elementary Education (BSED), and Bachelor of Science in Industrial Technology. In the short period since it began, TCC has gained the national and regional attention [31] by producing a number of top board passers in the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET). Despite the everyday problems and constraints that beset every local colleges, on 2011, it ranked No. 8 out of the 1,302 colleges and universities that participated in the Professional Regulatory Commission-administered licensure examination for teachers in the secondary level in school years 2008 to 2009, and 2009 to 2010 [32]. In 2013, Republic Act No. 10594: An Act Establishing a State College in the City of Talisay, Province of Cebu to be known as the Talisay City State College and Appropriating Funds Therefor was approved and signed into law by President Aquino on June 4, 2013. Its general mandate reads:

“The College shall primarily provide advanced education, higher technological, professional instruction and training in science, education, agriculture, fishery and industrial fields and other relevant areas of study. It shall also undertake research and extension services and programs in food production, nutrition, health and sports development, and provide progressive leadership in its areas of specialization.

However, Talisay City College's (TCC) transition into a state college did not materialize as CHED told that Talisay City government must comply with accreditation requirements before the conversion takes effect. Among the requirements set by CHED is for the TCC to have at least one of its undergraduate programs and two graduate programs to have level III accreditation [33]. Moreover, this situation will be occasioned by certain episodes exogenous to the

immediate domain of the educational venture. On the 2013 local election, Johnny V. Reyes, a prominent business elite, was elected as the new mayor of Talisay defeating Eduardo “Eddie” Gullas, of the famous Gullas political clan, the entrenched political family of Talisay and one of the prominent provincial elites in Cebu for the past few decades especially after appointed by the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos, which McCoy calls as the country’s top patron [34] and Sidel as the “national boss” [35]. It would not take long for him to initiate key decisions. The newly-elected mayor, opted to appoint a new TCC president, Dr. Paulus Maria Cañete, replacing Richel Bacaltos, the acting TCC president, whom he claims to be a “midnight appointee” of the previous mayor, Socrates Fernandez, a political ally of Eduardo Gullas. Through Executive Order 2014-007, De los Reyes had ordered the acting president Bacaltos to relinquish his post in favour of his appointee Dr. Paulus Maria Cañete, who interestingly heads the breakaway faction of the controversial Mandaue City College. De los Reyes argued that Cañete is more qualified to hold the TCC presidency since he holds a doctoral degree, unlike Bacaltos who has none. In addition, De los Reyes noted that Bacaltos was the city administrator of the Fernandez and was hastily appointed to the position since the former TCC president, Dr. Tomas Ramos, was implicated in the alleged fund discrepancies in the school as noted by the Commission on Audit (COA) [36].

Defending vehemently on the legitimacy of his appointment, Bacaltos refused to step down citing the support from the Board of Trustees (BOT), the highest governing body of the city college, appointing him as the acting president of TCC. He argued that until such time the Board decides to terminate his appointment as the acting president and recognize Cañete as the ‘new’ college president, he will not vacate the position. Invoking the legality ascribed to the powers of the Board of Trustee, Bacaltos reminded De los Reyes that while the mayor sits as the chair of the BOT, any actions for the school shall be decided collectively. This was reiterated by the City Vice Mayor Romeo Villarante who branded Cañete’s appointment as “illegal” and that the “appointment of the TCC president should be based on the recommendation of a search committee created by the school board” [37].

Interestingly, Villarante also pointed out that even the appointment of Bacaltos as the school president is “flawed” because “he is a faculty member of a university in Cebu City” and that this is in transgression with the amended ordinance of city college which

provides that “the administration of the college shall be vested in the President of Talisay City College who shall render full time service” [38]. As can be expected, cases were filed by both parties. Dr. Cañete filed a complaint of unlawful appointment against former City mayor Socrates Fernandez and five members of the TCC Board of Trustees before the Talisay City Prosecutor’s Office [39]. For his part, Bacaltos filed a petition for permanent injunction against Cañete and De los Reyes [40].

Two heads, two diplomas: The Gullases and Ched interventions

This issue reached its tipping point when Bacaltos decided to padlocked the office of the acting president and the Registrar’s Office. Then, Cañete went around the campus, introduce himself as the new president and also converted one of the rooms into his office [41]. Naturally, the effect is utter surprise and public confusion to the students, as they don’t know whom to believe in [42] [43]. Later, the situation went from bad to worse, as the commencement and graduation rites was fast approaching. Speculations were prevalent that the graduates will be given two sets of diplomas signed by Paulus Maria Cañete and Richel Bacaltos [44]. It did not help the students’ state of affairs that both parties have asked graduating students to see them for their concerns individually, especially for signing their transcript of records. Also, non-teaching personnel hired by the acting school president were affected. The Mayor suspiciously stops the payment of 35 non-teaching personnel hired Bacaltos for failure to show contracts of appointments. Bacaltos responded that these new job-order workers were approved by the Board of Trustees. Yet, the mayor insisted there is not enough money to pay for these personnel. Interestingly, it was occasioned with prompt actions such as a manifesto with 500 signatures of students and faculty members of TCC called on Talisay City Mayor Johnny V. delos Reyes to assume the school’s presidency. It was signed by the faculty association president, alumni president and Supreme Student Government which called for a revamp of the school’s Board of Trustees [45].

Aside from the school leadership haggling, another controversy emerges as the Commission on Higher Education has discovered that the school offered some degree programs without its approval. This has tremendous implications for graduating students specifically as they heavily rely upon their diplomas as ticket to success, what would happen if this turns out to

be just a useless piece of paper? [46]. Over the few months, these issues shrouded the whole TCC into a controversy transforming it into an arena of competing narratives for legitimate claims. Even the defeated former Mayor Eduardo “Eddie” Gullas, considered by many as the father of TCC, raised concerns about the situation of the college, calling the actions of the Mayor as “wilful disrespect to the rule of law”, “projecting discord and distrust” and “feared that under De los Reyes leadership or lack of it, the city is going nowhere” [48]. Gullas then cited the 3rd City Ordinance No. 2008-11 in Section 6 which provides for the Administration of the College:

“(a) the administration of the college shall be vested in the president of the Talisay City College who shall render full time service. He shall be appointed by the Board of Trustees, upon the recommendation of a duly constituted search committee,...and (c) in case of vacancy by reason of death, resignation removal for cause or incapacity of the college president to perform the functions of his office, the Board shall have the authority designate an officer-in-charge pending the appointment of a new president.”

In like manner, Rep. Gerald Anthony “Samsam” Gullas Jr, grandson of Eduardo Gullas, the Cebu First District representative, urged Reyes to solve the matter as “students are affected” and reminded him that “even if the mayor is the chairman of the board, no executive order can rule to pull Bacaltos out his post. Gullas said the decision of BOT is needed and should prevail,” [48]. This is a definitive support of the BOT decision to approve Bacaltos, an appointee of former mayor Fernandez, a political ally.

As the country’s main agency on higher education system, CHED had intervened. A series of meetings and negotiations were done for the resolution of the fiasco. Eventually, as pressure mounted for De los Reyes, he finally agreed to withdraw his order appointing Dr. Paulus Cañete as Talisay City College president on the condition that Richel Bacaltos steps down from his post. In exchange, the mayor has agreed that the personnel hired by Bacaltos will continue to receive their salaries charged to the supplemental budget. Under this agreement, CHED Region VII Director Dr. Freddie Bernal temporarily assume the presidency of the TCC until a search committee appoints a new president. Ultimately, Dr. Bernal had to step down on orders of his superiors. What happened consequently was a string of

local personalities taking reins of the campus, on an acting capacity and lasts for a few months. Finally, the search committee appointed Dr. Edgar Martinez as the TCC “caretaker”, after previously appointed presidents Dr. Joseph Sol Galleon, the associate dean of Cebu Normal University, have tendered resignation for health reasons; and, Dr. Ester Velasquez, declined the appointment due to her commitment in Cebu Cherish School in Cebu City [49].

The return of the local patron

Since then, Dr. Martinez was the TCC head, until another local political development beckon after the periodic electoral cycle: Eddie Gullas returns to the City Hall as the new local chief executive. Inevitably, Gullas reinstated Richel Bacaltos as president of the city college. A little over three years after he was removed as the college president by former Mayor De los Reyes, Bacaltos “vowed to restore the local college’s honor and glory as one of the country’s top training schools for teachers” and as ordered from Gullas “to implement changes in the city-owned college, including removing 20 contractual faculty members”[50]. In fact, in a complete twist of political fate, De los Reyes is facing a falsification charge released by Ombudsman Conchita Carpio Morales for “unlawfully issuing an executive order appointing Dr. Paulus Mariae Cañete as officer in charge (OIC) of the Talisay City College (TCC) without authority” [51]. In the resolution, the Ombudsman argued that being the city Mayor of Talisay as well as the Chairman of the Board of Trustees, De los Reyes “took advantage of his official position when he issued the executive order,” despite no authority was given by the BOT to appoint the college president or even designate an OIC.

Analysis and Comparison

Based on the narratives above, we witness two distinct but analogous sets of experiences from both city colleges in Cebu. In Mandaue City College, the impasse revolves around the presence of another school bearing similar name, established by the out-of-favor former college administrator. This occurred as a response from the decision of the newly-elected Mayor to appoint a different college head. Though the allegations of corruption were cited as the chief reason why he was removed, and while the case still has no finality from the court, the decision of the Mayor throughout the whole debacle is perceived to be a clear expression of his power and influence. In addition, the Board of Trustee has concurred with the local chief executive

adding greater magnitude to his intrepid assertion of authority.

As the situation unravels, shades of debt-of-gratitude were manifested in the headstrong resolve of the deposed school head to the former mayor, the one who appointed him to the position before the periodic change of the local political guard. In the process, this school administrator himself has internalized the political aspect of the problem in the academic institution, which interestingly left him to argue that only through a political action e.g. running for public office, can the problem in the city college be truly resolve. This decision can also be viewed as an action towards challenging the authority of the Mayor in allocating the scarce resources in the local government. The accompanying decision of the mayor not to recognize the claim of the former administrator is in itself an assertion of power and authority.

While in Talisay City College, the conflict arose when the newly elected mayor decided to appoint a new college administrator, which essentially replaced and contradicted the college administrator appointed by the previous local chief executive and was duly acknowledged and supported by the members of the Board of Trustees, as the highest governing body of the college. Unlike the case of Mandaue, the seating Mayor was not able to generate the needed support from the Board of Trustees, despite being the chair of the said governing body. This situation became extremely polarizing after legal cases were filed by both camps who remained headstrong on their claims for legitimate rule of the college. This eventually ushered a wave of local personalities, in ad hoc capacities, governing the college after the administrative regulation made by CHED as the highest academic body of the country.

During the whole process, while confine to commentaries in the local broadsheet, the meddling of the former political patron who the locales touted as the “father of the city college” being instrumental in the establishment of the school, was clearly manifested. Being an influential politician of the city and in the region, his tirades against the seating mayor, his political rival, that discredits and laments his political opponent, can be perceived to be driven by the logic of local political dynamics. This assertion will be validated later on as this political patron ran again and won back the Mayor’s office on 2016.

In both cases, we see narratives of confusion engendered on the part of students and other major stakeholders of the college as a direct result of this educational-cum-political tension. In what was

originally conceived as an educational policy intended to address higher educational gaps at the local level, the creation of local colleges and universities, based on the experience of two LCUs in this study, showed how public education, as what Johnson argued, becomes now a political enterprise.

It cannot be denied that as a service delivery provision of the local government, educational policies such as LGU venture into the higher education requires full grasp of the socio-political context upon which these local colleges operates. Generally, in both cases, it all boils down to episodes of political appointments done by the mayor, that is patronage-driven, which triggered counter political responses. In Talisay, the reciprocal nature of patronage is observed in how this college president-turn-politician bank on the 'appointment' made by the sitting mayor and bolster his claims of the resource that is the position of a college president. On the other hand, in Mandaue, the college president rely on the 'appointment' made by the former mayor and shore up his decision to create a new school, based on that mayoral support. In a concrete way, we see here expressions of what Wong argued that any serious discussion of school governance and decisions are embedded in the core practices of the country's political system.

In addition, the role the Board of Trustees in both cases is emblematic of the power structure embedded in such colleges. Under CHED Memorandum Order No. 32, Series of 2006: Policies, Standards and Guidelines on the Establishment and Operation of Local Colleges and Universities; the Governing Board of a college shall be its Board of Trustees (BOT) with following composition:

Chairman, Local Chief Executive; Vice-Chairman, President of the college; and seven (7) members composed of, but not limited to, the President of the Faculty Association, President of the Supreme Student Council/Government, President of the Alumni Association, Chairman of the Sanggunian Committee on Education, ALCU representative, Commission on Higher Education with rank not lower than Director and accredited business or industry sector.

However, all academic and administrative matters pertaining to the college is subject to the approval of the Board of Trustees. In both cases, the distinct decision of each BOTs to approve and disapprove the Mayor's decision, based on the experience mentioned above, is

determined largely by the structural configuration of the BOT itself. Despite the chair of the BOT, the mayor still has to persuade and earn the allegiance of the members of the Board. In a sense, the Board can be viewed as a democratic set up to check and balance the powers of the local chief executive at the local level. This is precisely what happened in the case of Talisay, the mayor's decision to appoint his own college head was prostrated by the powers and functions accorded to the Board which opted for a different school leader.

Ultimately, the narratives of both cases reinforces the notion that educational policies like local government initiated colleges is shaped and influenced by the broader political institutions and decision-making process and has advanced the understanding of power structure and democratic practice in the Philippine political arena.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study started with two objectives: (1) how the experience of both city colleges be viewed under the rubric of 'politics of education' approach; and (2) how the realities of local political dynamics shape the venture of both city colleges. Using politics of education framework, the study highlighted the political dimension of the educational venture. In both cases, we see several manifestations of power and influence occurring at the school setting: contestation for school governance, assertion of legitimacy and authority of school management, meddling of former political patrons and intervention of academic regulatory bodies. More importantly, this study displayed nuances of political patronage as noted by Lande [53] and Hollnsteiner [54], the partisan politics and the clientelist exercise of debt-of-gratitude which Kawanaka [55] and Kerkvliet [56] regarded to be so embedded in Philippine politics.

This is triggered by episodes of political appointment done by the local chief executives, vigorously analysed by Hodder [57] after every electoral cycle which has tremendous implications to the sustainability of the local government school. As a result, the college, transformed into a virtual battleground of competing political leadership; and their contention of legitimacy became its ammunition to advance its particularistic desires. Lodged under the context of Philippine local political dynamics, the experience of two city colleges demonstrated how contentious public education ventures can be. As such, it engenders resistance and opposition which ultimately compels its stakeholders to navigate through the

political process. With both educational and political actors converging on the issue at hand, the space for negotiation of asserting one's definition of public good becomes a contestation for power and authority.

In both cases, we see evidence of what Malen remarked on the interface of politics and education, that:

"...we understand politics as a force, for good or ill, and work to develop a keener understanding of the complexities and the consequences of power relations and political processes. The school is certainly a sensible place to anchor effort. It is an institution for political socialization, an object of political contest and an arena of political negotiation." (p. 160)

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